

SUDHINDRANATH DATTA

The sculpture reproduced on the enpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

SUDHINDRANATH DATTA

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To the memory of Buddhadeva Bose
and Rajeshwari Datta

Foreword

Six books of poems, one book of verse translations, two books of essays, an unfinished autobiography in English, and a few miscellaneous pieces including the early pages of a novel—this is the output of Sudhindranath Datta, a major Bengali poet after Tagore. Of course there is some unpublished writing, but not much, even the juvenilia is meagre. The rumour that he was a sparse writer, perhaps the most sparse of his generation and the most painstaking, may not be totally unfounded: in fact he once spent a whole evening condensing the rather loose Bengali 'has gone away in flight' into a terse 'flying', which scandalized Tagore so much that though he approved the dedication he also cautioned him that if he continued this way his pen would soon dry up. And whether or not for this fastidiousness alone, his pen, which however had never been very prolific, almost stopped flowing after the first fifteen years or so. Not that he did not write anything any more, but wrote rarely, except in the last few years when he seemed to have a minor creative spell again. But the other rumour, that his poetry is obscure, perhaps the most obscure of his generation's, may not be so well-founded; his vocabulary is surely a bit unfamiliar at times, and syntax complex, besides his allusions are often rather demanding—but what all this amounts to is an initial difficulty, and once that has been overcome he is perhaps the least obscure of his generation. Tagore's blessing that he was an artist of the intellect, may not have been an absolute boon: who else of his generation has written of love with such candour and such passion? Besides who else has manipulated sound with such effect?

Sudhindranath's first book of poems was dedicated to Tagore, "not to pay back, but acknowledge the debt", and indeed there was a lot to acknowledge. But from his second book his individuality was fully asserted; not only did he write a new kind of experience, but evolved a new style and a new poetic idiom. He was the most poetic and the most prosaic at the same time: the purest emotion in him was structured in terms of the keenest intellect, or the keenest intellect often released the purest emotion. His use of such conjunctions as 'though', 'yet', 'still' and 'nevertheless' was amazing, especially since he wrote a heavily traditional verse. The last marked him as unique among his contemporaries, he was about the only one who never tried his hand in free verse or the prose poem or any other such experiment. On the contrary he equated poetry with order and harmony, for he probably saw such anarchy and unruliness in the world that this seemed to him the only sensible human act. Mallarmé became his ideal in this, for in Mallarmé he saw the closest approximation to a pure consciousness.

Mallarmé makes it clear that Sudhindranath's exposure to Western literature was quite wide. But he had a good grounding in Sanskrit also. This duality which is symptomatic of the English-educated Indian intellectuals in general, perhaps took a special shape in him. Was there a crisis of identity? What exactly did he mean when he wrote: "And I, as old as the twentieth century, / Drowning in Bengal Bay, no hero, yet a witness to cumulative ruin / Since birth, through wars and revolutions, have grown dead cold / To humanists' hymns and Evolution's comfort, / And more averse to the past than regressive to progress"? Or was it mere modesty that prompted him to say: "My father was a confident Vedantist; and though, irritated since adolescence with the ineffable excesses of the monistic Absolute, I turned at an early age to dialectical materialism, I doubt if I have yet acquired any autonomy

of judgment" ? These are questions that should concern us when we approach Sudhindranath, and although this may not be the place to venture any answers, still I hope a pattern emerges in the brief profile I am going to attempt.

One

SUDHINDRANATH Datta was born the same year as this century, on 30 October 1901. He was the second child and eldest son of Hirendranath Datta and Indumati Vasu Mallik ; if birth is a measure of luck then he was indeed lucky, for both his father's and mother's families were very prosperous. The Dattas had a history going back to Gobindapur, one of the three villages that combined into Calcutta ; when Fort William was erected at the site of their home, the East India Company settled them at Chorebagan in the centre of the town. But long before Sudhindranath's birth his grandfather had left that ancestral home and built his own house at Hatibagan, which came to be known as "the house of dolls" because of a row of cast-iron sentries in front. Sudhindranath's maternal grandfather and granduncles too had branched off from their family home at Pataldanga and moved to Wellington Square, later renamed after his uncle.

"The house of dolls" has recently been pulled down, only a small portion still stands at 139 Bidhan Sarani, formerly Cornwallis Street. It was a three-storied building with a fairly large front and a spacious court inside, laid out in the usual elaborate manner of old houses in Calcutta. His grandfather, Dwarakanath, had made quite a bit of money as a guarantor ('banyan') in an Anglo-Greek mercantile firm ; after his death the guarantorship stayed in the family, but his second son Hirendranath had a rather hard time though he braced it bravely. He did a number of things which the Dattas had not done before, for instance he went to college for more than mere form. Besides he had none of the family vices and led a simple life from

early manhood. And as it were in revenge his immediate younger brother turned out to be a real profligate and squandered away not only his patrimony but the fabulous fortune he earned as one of the most creative actor-director-authors of the Bengali public stage, and such was the intensity of his life-style that he died a premature death at forty.

Sudhindranath has written equally affectionately of his father and his father's younger brother in his unfinished autobiography and it may not be idle to suggest that Hirendranath and Amarendranath were two very permanent influences on him—a rationalist with an occasional impulse and a genius who would not thrive without his irrationalities. Both have their separate place in the history of the Bengali mind of the last hundred years or so, and for Sudhindranath to inherit from both is also a part of the historical causality. But be that as it may, it will be indeed unjust to overlook the influence of his mother; it might have been the most obvious but it was also the most sustaining. Daughter of Probodhchandra Vasu Mallik, niece of Manmatha and Hemchandra, and sister of Raja Subodhchandra—all illustrious people, a shade more or a shade less—she had a lot of personality and was not only a loving wife but an affectionate sister-in-law, for if there was one person in that joint household openly indulgent to the wayward Amar, it was she. And it was on her insistence that the boy Sudhindra was taken to see his uncle's performance, fortunately on an evening when his success was almost fabulous by all standards.

His other uncle, his father's elder brother Dhirendranath, was by that time a retired gentleman, repentant of his wild oats, critical of both his third brother and his own son who was walking in his discarded shoes, no luminary but an acclaimed connoisseur of music and an enchanting story-teller for the children. Sudhindra spent a lot of his childhood with him: on holidays they went to places

together, mainly Benaras, and spent summer days in his country-house near Calcutta where the glassy pond, no less than the mirrored ball-room, held the young boy's fancy. Sudhindra's father had indulged him when he had been very young and a sickly child—he had trips with his parents to Darjeeling and Jabalpur ; his uncle was doing it now probably because Sudhindra was the nearest substitute for his wayward son. This cousin Sudhindra was quite shy of and also quite junior to, but there was another he was rather fond of—his uncle Amar's son Satyendranath in whose magazine he first appeared in print.

The two uncles, Dhiren and Amar, died within fifteen days of one another, in 1915-16. Meanwhile from 1914 Sudhindra had been at Benaras receiving formal schooling at the Theosophical School founded by Annie Besant in 1912. He had a companion there from home, his immediate younger brother Harindra, only three years his junior and quite close. The school was small, about 200 students, but truly national ; that was perhaps the only school where Hirendranath, one of the founders of the National Council of Education in Bengal, could send his sons. The Headmaster was P.K. Telang, a Maharashtrian, until he left to look after Annie Besant's *New India* when she was interned, and was replaced by Iqbal Narain Gurtu who later became the vice-chancellor of Allahabad University. The English teacher Miss Harrington had a personal library and Sudhindra read up the most part of it including such authors as Dumas and Dickens. But there was stress on Sanskrit too ; and Sudhindra also picked up some spoken Hindi. However he was not a mere bibliophil : he was interested in sports as well, mainly outdoor such as cricket, football and tennis. He was sociable : his three most intimate friends apart from his brother were an English, a Sinhalese and a Burmese boy. Besides in a theosophical convention at Lucknow in 1916 he and his brother were volunteers.

In Benaras they at first lived in the family house and

then moved to the school premises. But in 1917 they were called back to Calcutta and admitted to the Oriental Seminary—Tagore's school some five decades ago—Sudhindra in the first class, the present ten. He had also two private tutors, one on evenings for Sanskrit and the other for Mathematics on mornings. In 1918 he matriculated in the first division and was admitted to the Scottish Church College.

It was about this time that he must have begun his first exercises in verse-making and also had his first appearance in print. His cousin Satyendra, in imitation of his father, brought out a magazine, *Natyapratibha* devoted chiefly to theatre. In its first and only issue there was a translation, of Tennyson's "The Brook". It was signed underneath by "the editor", for no comprehensible reasons, for as Harindranath tells us and as Sudhindra himself has hinted, the translation was Sudhindra's. It was not a very brilliant beginning for one who was going to be one of the major poets of his generation, although the refrain was rather ably handled and the rhythmic sense in general alert. Besides being his first publisher the editor was also probably his first reader and literary friend cum mentor.

But Sudhindra's greatest mentor at home was his father ; at various times Sudhindra studied some philosophy and literature with him, chiefly English and Sanskrit—reading with him "The Ancient Mariner" became the very last word in poetry. A learned man, a Hindu nationalist with enough reason to recognize our debt to the West, his father was also a successful man of the world, a solicitor-at-law who earned a fabulous practice. A Vedantist, he reinterpreted a lot of ancient Indian philosophy and religion which was serialized in the most part in the magazine his son started in the thirties. But in the early years of this century his renown was chiefly as an activist patriot and a theosophist ; as a matter of fact in certain circles his main credentials were the Theosophical Society, but his friendship with Annie

Besant involved a number of other things as well. He did not appreciate Gandhi and although to start with he was not very sympathetic with Tagore, he later revised his opinion. However his own exercises in poetry in old age, especially his translation from Kalidasa, did not deserve much merit and his son felt that he could have done better by not bringing them out. Sudhindra called his father a "confident Vedantist" and confessed that it was the excess of the monistic Absolute in his early youth that led him to dialectical materialism. This might be a little figurative, but there is no doubt that they were of two different worlds. And yet up to a point they agreed, chiefly on the need of an essential rationality in society ; beyond that they had respect for one another if not full understanding. So great was the son's gratitude to the father that he has left his entire property to perpetuate his father's memory.

After I.A. (Intermediate Arts) Sudhindra first enrolled in the English Honours—in the same college—but later switched to the pass course (English, Bengali, Economics, History). Unlike the other major poets of his generation he never had a flair for the academic studies, although he was one of the most well-read young men of his day. Jibanananda Das taught all his life and so has Bishnu Dey, Amiya Chakravarty is still on a faculty, and though Buddhadeva Bose for quite some time made his living by writing alone he began his career as a teacher and later in life founded the Comparative Literature department at Jadavpur University where he invited Sudhindranath to teach—the only time Sudhindranath was really involved in the academe. We shall see below that his adventure in the English M.A. was rather half-hearted. Anyway he passed his B.A. with distinction.

That was in 1922. Meanwhile his intimacy with his mother's family had begun to take a shape. 12 Wellington Square had always been a favourite place, its liberty and Westernization or its modernization, as opposed to the

orthodox atmosphere at home, had come to make a telling effect on Sudhindra's personality. In a way he was a combination of two cultures; without being an actual W.O.G. (Westernized Oriental Gentleman)—there had been some talk of sending him to England for his schooling—he had an Occidental bent of mind, and yet his roots in the native soil ran deep. The two houses, separated by a straight two mile or so, were rather symbolic; a simple tram ride would take him from white mattresses and whiter pillows on floor to an upholstered drawing room, a billiard board and a library, from a Bengali cuisine to three or five course dinners. Not that the Westernized Malliks were any the less patriotic; his uncle's involvement with the nationalist cause was fabulous, even earlier his Cambridge-educated granduncle Manmatha had retaliated a humiliating communication from the Government of India addressed to him as "Babu M.C. Mallik" with a "Babu X.Y. Smith from M.C. Mallik Esq.". And his younger granduncle Hemchandra had been so obsessed with the idea of liquidating Curzon that he had clandestinely paid twenty thousand rupees to a charlatan. But ever since his grandfather Probodh Mallik had left the ancestral home there had been an Anglo-Bengali atmosphere in the new house. Manmatha Mallik had ended up in Cambridge and though Hem Mallik's son Nirod, unlike his cousin Subodh, had not gone to Oxbridge, he also had been exposed to the West by way of Japan. And these latter two were very fond of their nephew, though by the time Sudhindra had acquired substantial discerning Subodh Mallik had died. However his intimacy with younger Nirod grew deeper; as a matter of fact 12 Wellington Square almost became a daily habit. His father's father had left the clan and built a house in some ways unlike that sprawling mansion on Mukhtaram Babu Street—for example the family shrine never had any animal sacrifice; but essentially it was another such Hindu house. This is where 12 Wellington Square offered a

different bill of fare to the young Sudhindra. It may not be wrong to trace some of his habits here : cigarette smoking was surely an offence at 139 Cornwallis Street, yet it was about this time that he took to that. The same was true of the Western clothes. The constraint which his adolescent spirit might have felt at home, in spite of course of all the other encouragement, was lifted here : but did it also lead to a certain degree of abandon ?

Anyway, by 1922 he might have done some more exercise at verse-making, though his extant notebooks begin to date a little later. He had a habit of writing on scraps—in fact his first notebook was partly a copy—and it was not unlikely that some of them were lost (even perhaps destroyed ?). In 1922 he also ventured in three other simultaneous things : the English M.A. in Calcutta University, their law course and attorneyship as an articled clerk with his father—quite ambitious, chiefly for one who might not have been capable of such a coercive programme of self-discipline. And the result was quite disastrous : he dropped out of his M.A. lectures after one year, and though he attended the Law College for another year and stayed articled for five, he did not take either of the examinations. Incidentally, in more than one of his juvenile stories the hero is an attorneyship apprentice and an unmistakable misfit. However this alienation did not develop into a crisis, for his father in the first place did not seem to have set much material store by his eldest son : he appreciated his natural bent of mind, even though he would have liked him to learn a trade to make his living.

Was there any special reason why he dropped out of the English M.A. ? There was an incident. A professor once asked him to read out Chaucer in class. He did it unwillingly. The second time was more unwilling. The third time, or was it the fourth, he balked, no, he was not going to read out or recite like a schoolboy. This was Prafulla Ghosh, a doyen of the English teaching in Calcutta.

Sudhindra was expelled from his lectures. He was also summoned to the Vice-Chancellor's office : the great Ashutosh Mukherjee asked him to apologize to Professor Ghosh. Sudhindra did that under protest. Did he go back to Professor Ghosh's lectures, or was it then that he stopped going altogether ? Professor Ghosh could have had asked Sudhindra to read out Chaucer because he read well. He had a full voice and read poetry perfectly understandingly and with emotion. Anyone who heard him will remember the resonance : the His Master's Voice album of his reading of the poem "Orchestra", copied from Harvard University's Lamant Library, is sure proof of that.

Professor Percival, another famous English teacher, had a private study circle in the College Street Y.M.C.A., Sudhindra used to go there, but this too was not sustained long. However his academic indifference was compensated for by his ample reading. Besides it was in 1922-23 that he must have begun French, for one of his early poems in his first extant notebook is a translation of the famous Verlaine poem "Il pleure dans mon coeur". Also, this was when he probably began his visits to Rabindranath : Jorasanko was quite close and his father knew Rabindranath. Some of his early poems would prove that his exposure to Tagore did a lot of triggering for his own poetry : rightly he would later dedicate his first book of poems "humbly to Rabindranath Tagore".

His second book of essays, his last published book in his lifetime, bears the dedication to "Shri Dhirendranath Mitra, unrivalled in patience and sympathy among my first readers", and one of his most important poems, the poem that gave his second book its title, "Orchestra", to "Sri Apurbakumar Chanda, friend". These two friendships were two of the earliest he picked up outside home ; but both were also relations : Dhirendranath had married his cousin, Subodh Mallik's daughter, and Apurba Chanda another, Nirod Mallik's sister's daughter. He was specially fond of

Dhirendranath, also his parents' favourite, and through him acquired another valuable friendship, with Satyendranath Bose the physicist to whom the book *Orchestra* was dedicated. Sudhindra was capable of a lot of affection and Satyendranath of no less : in spite of the odd years between them the friendship was of the most enviable kind and sustained for two decades or so. Those who were present in Sudhindranath's funeral will recall with what profound emotion did the grey-haired physicist pay his last respects to the greying poet.

The dropping out of the academe, not taking the prospects of a legal profession seriously and friendships outside home, were all in a way Sudhindra's coming of age, and surely no amount of persuasion would induce this gifted modernist to accept the necessity of an M.A. degree or a passport to the law. But there was another thing which needed persuasion, as a matter of fact quite a bit of it, for Sudhindra was not yet ready to get married. The family however felt that it was the right age for marriage. A theme that seemed somewhat obsessive in his juvenile writings, a part of which was fiction, was unwilling marriage. Sudhindra managed to resist one or two proposals. But the elders persisted, let him at least have a look at the girl and then decide. He agreed, went and had a look ; and he liked her. He agreed to marry.

This was Chhabirani Bhose, daughter of Sarojendra Bhose of 72 Cornwallis Street. The family was well-connected, well-rooted and prosperous. Tall, fair and well-featured, quite developed for her age—fifteen—she looked a perfect match for Sudhindra, tall, fair and handsome ; to some they almost looked blood-relations. But in one thing the match was rather unequal, Chhabi did not have much formal education or exposure. Of course this did not normally matter in Hindu marriages—Sudhindra's own mother had not been much better, in fact she had been married at too tender an age for that, nine. But there was

a difference here between Hirendranath and his son : Sudhindra expected his wife to adjust to his fast-expanding world, not just stay a daughter-in-law or become an absolute matron reigning over the inner court. The invisible wall was quite normal in a traditional Hindu home, and even a W.O.G. might not mind it always, but Sudhindra was an honest modernist who would like his wife to have a full share of his life. Anyway, in 1924 this question was not urgent ; the marriage was announced. The happiness was enhanced for his brother Harindra's marriage too was fixed at the same time. On 22 July Sudhindra's marriage took place, his brother's the next day. Hirendranath added rooms to the top floor of the house. In May 1925 Sudhindra's wife gave birth to a stillborn child.

Sudhindranath's first extant notebook dates from 1923. Its title page has an inscription in Bengali : "May Mother Durga come in aid / Compositions / Sri Sudhindranath Datta / No. 139 Cornwallis Street". Buddhadeva Bose in his introduction to the Collected Poems of Sudhindranath published shortly after his death, brought our notice to this and suggested that this beginning from the very scratches was in some ways symbolic of his literary career, an endless struggle of the conscious mind against unconscious matter. The handwriting was that of one Bibhuti Mukherjee, the housekeeper's son, who must have been commissioned by the young verse-maker to make a copy of his early exercises, and the invocation to the goddess was probably the scribe's own idea ; but Sudhindra himself made such inscriptions in his own hand on some of the subsequent notebooks though minus the goddess and sometimes minus the title "Compositions". A few poems including two or three translations, and three pieces of fiction—that is the first notebook. The poems are on various themes but on the whole a bit plaintive, showing an influence of 19th century European poetry. Metrically they are not always sure, one can see that the young verse-maker was learning—in fact there is a

drill in the Sanskrit *Mandakṛanta*. As to the translations, one is that of a poem by Landor, but a more interesting one is that of the Verlaine poem mentioned above—it fits perfectly that Sudhindranath who would make some classic translations from French Symbolist poetry, should have among his first attempts at verse-making a rendering of this poem of Verlaine's. Another interesting thing about this notebook as well as the other early ones, is that he tried some fiction. Who would accept Sudhindranath today as a could-have-been novelist or short story writer? Yet he went on trying and produced quite a few not too short stories. The very first one, the one in the first notebook and a story about "a passage to England", might have some autobiographical details; so might the second and the third, and the fourth one, and therefore though they are all more or less equally juvenile they might have been quite wish-fulfilling for the author. Anyway, as specimens of his juvenile prose style too they are rather interesting, the Bengali is not only colloquial but, unlike his later critical prose, at times racy.

The second notebook is of the same time as the first, 1923; in fact some poems of the first are seen drafted in the second—perhaps the two were used simultaneously. Anyway there is a fairly long narrative poem in the second, the kind first attempted; besides we have short poems and fiction. The third notebook begins in late 1923 spilling over to 24 and contains only poems, a few of which are rather longish. Of them, a few again are laid out as dialogue, the themes of which are taken from ancient myths, Urvashi featuring in two of them—the model surely was Tagore's verse of the same kind, "Karna-Kunti-Samvad" for instance. The rest of the third notebook are the usual personal lyrics except a short one, a translation from Shelley.

The next notebook, the fourth, is spread over 1924. Four of its poems were later revised and included in a book

as juvenile writing. Other than these there are two long poems, one of which was written almost immediately after his marriage, the rest short as usual. But did the marriage make a change in the poetry? Did the love that had been his main subject acquire a new meaning, perhaps a reality which had not been there? Notebook 5 should give us an answer for it begins about two months after the marriage and goes on to the next year, and notebook 6 which covers the larger part of the second year of marriage and 7, from 1926 to early 28—or the book *Tanvi*, his first book of poems which was gathered from these three notebooks.

Tanvi (The Lissom Beauty) came out in 1930, but since all its poems were written between 1924 and 27, except the title piece which was added later, let us take a look at it here. It was put at the end of Sudhindranath's *Kavyasamgraha* (Collected Poems) on the ground that he would not probably have reissued it without a thorough revision, and that as his very first book it would interest mainly those who are already familiar with his poetry. True *Tanvi* does not quite make it always, true it does not always have the absolute voice of experience; yet it does have some authenticity and is not simply a book by a poetaster who could not do much better than writing on usual themes in a usual tone. Of its twenty-eight poems some surely are tailored, but there are others which came straight from his psyche. They are mostly love poems and the woman that is celebrated here is in all probability his wife. There is a bit of the first flush, but what perhaps dominates as genuine feeling is a certain disillusion, a discovery that though everything is still there, something seems to have passed. A cluster of poems builds this up, but one in particular, written on the first wedding anniversary and of the title "Vatsarik" (The Anniversary). There is a pervading gloom in it which might be the beginning of that despair that marked Sudhindranath's poetry all his life. Of course the poem as such does not have much merit—the form is

quite conventional, but then the form of the *Tanvi* poems in general is quite conventional. Another poem also seems autobiographical, though a bit obliquely, a poem called "Anahuta" (The Uninvited). I suspect it is about his stillborn child, wistful and yet perceptive : Sudhindranath was going to stay childless, even his second marriage would stay barren—looking from that point of view the poem seems a bit comprehensive. The form is again absolute Tagore, an imitation of a poem like "Varshasesh" (The Year Ends). The vocabulary too is very much that, but the tone of an incipient nihilism is Sudhindranath's own. Anyway, this poem and the one before and a few others established his authenticity as a poet : true he had not yet evolved a style of his own and anyone familiar with his later poetry may not recognize them all as his, still the tone was unmistakably his where it was genuinely voiced. Perhaps not so much in the sonnets—they sound a bit sententious ; however the rhymes are quite good and structure quite supple.

Tanvi may not be juvenile, but it is youthful, if that makes any distinction. In other words *Tanvi* is not very sure of itself, its author is still doing exercise. But what has happened between his first four notebooks and these three, is he has approximated an experience. To be sure it does not have much moment—its implications are probably a bit too immediate ; still it is more than imagining experience from other people's poetry. Maybe it is on these grounds that Tagore approved *Tanvi* and endorsed its publication. Maybe that is why, rather than pushing it to an appendix, we should simply read it as his first book. If we are specialists we may begin there, but if we are lay readers then it is perhaps better to turn to it after an exposure to his other books, the second for instance, *Orchestra*.

Two

Tanvi came out in 1930, but by that time Sudhindranath had taken a trip to North America and Europe and had come back—a rather special trip for he had gone with Tagore. He had thought of going to Europe before, especially after his B.A., but his father had objected: instead of his being called to the bar in England, he had been articled in Calcutta though of no ultimate avail. But there had been a talk still earlier, in 1912, of going to a British public school, and at that time it was his uncle Subodh Mallik, ironically a Cambridge alumnus himself, who had done the dissuading. However in 1929 there was no such dissuasion from any quarter, on the contrary it was felt that the trip might help for his health had been quite ailing for some time. Two others were travelling with Tagore, Sudhindra's friend Apurba Chanda as Tagore's secretary on the trip, and the American Methodist Boyd C. Tucker who had been sent by his mission to be of service to the Visvabharati. Tagore was going to Vancouver where he had been invited to attend an education conference.

In May 1928 Sudhindra bought a notebook at Ranchi where he had gone with his wife for reasons of health, the second time after marriage. Till the end of the year he only wrote a few poems there including a poem on the cock with which he won a bet with Tagore. They had a debate on modern poetry: Tagore thought that not everything was a fit subject for a poem, which was where modern poetry went wrong. But Sudhindra said that the subject did not matter, what mattered was the contained experience. Tagore wondered if one could write a poem, say, on the

cock. Sudhindra said he could and wrote. Tagore admitted that it was good and courted defeat, and sent the poem to *Pravasi* where it was published in September-October 1928 (Ashvin 1335 B.S.). This was literally his second appearance in print, but for all practical purposes first, for who indeed had read that juvenile translation from Tennyson which did not even bear his own signature? The poem on the cock, on the other hand, created a little stir and *Shanibarar Chithi*, that caustic weekly committed to an unholy crusade against all shades of modernism including the great Olympian's own at times, and used at the time the sketch of a cock on its cover, took up the issue and in its customary way published a parody. The original was remarkable for its terseness and its unusual vocabulary, the parody pushed it to an absurd extreme. Anyway, this threw open to Sudhindranath the lists and found a vocation for him.

This had been one of his problems. He did not have a taste for the law which was his father's profession and which his father had wanted him to pursue. True he was doing some journalism then, in 1928-29, honorary work at the editorial desk of the daily *Forward*, and was involved with the publicity squad of the Indian National Congress session that year: but did he have a taste for either journalism or politics? Or his association with the celebrated literary review *Sabuj Patra* in its new phase since 1925: was it anything very serious? True he had been writing, but was not that a little dilettantish? And his reading which was quite varied, did it seem to have an immediate purpose? On the back inside cover of his seventh notebook he had a list of names of the Dadaists: mere curiosity or preparation of a manifesto which was going to be his own or his own generation's? But with the *Pravasi* poem Sudhindra seemed to have earned a commitment. About this time he also read an essay in a literary meeting at the University Institute presided over by Atulchandra Gupta. It was one

of the first formulations of the tenets that guided the new poetry; he later published a revised version of it in the very first issue of his magazine. This is how it began :

Poetry is primordial. Or if that epithet hurts our scientific sense, then we may say that poetry was born the very day the primitive man first fastened by an unbreakable thread a variety of rhythmic sounds with diverse objects and different emotions. That was thousands of years ago. Then the human language gradually developed; and man perceived that those sentences were retained effortlessly in our memory which had no irregularities or pause. The subsequent growth of poetry from this inception is easy to conjecture: slowly here and there one or two must have begun to appear whose imagination was quicker than others', whose memory was more powerful than general humanity's, who were capable of recounting the memorable events on auspicious days in the silent approbation and very occasional participation of the assembled community. Little by little when clans became races, and man turned his daily chores into a variety of vocations, the irregular position of the chant-leader came to be taken over by the bard. The modern poet is the descendant of that bard.¹

With this 'manifesto', "Kavyer Mukti" (The Emancipation of Poetry), Sudhindranath graduated from a solitary soul trying to formulate his feelings to a historical being aware of his times. The ideas were most un-Tagore-like, a simple collation with Tagore's essay on "Modern Poetry" written about the same time will show the difference. In the poems of *Tanvi*, i.e. in the poems written a little earlier, he might have come at Tagore's heels, but no one would ever take "Kukkuṭ", the poem on the cock, for Tagore's or for a poem

1. I am quoting from Sudhindranath's first book of essays *Svagata*, 2nd edition, where this was included as the very first piece. Incidentally, translations here are mostly mine, the author's own and the one or two other available translations I have used have been specified. In the present excerpt I have taken help of the translation included in the Oxford University Press selection of Sudhindranath's writings, *The World of Twilight* (Calcutta 1970), translation by Edward Dimock and A.T.M. Anisuzzaman.

by any of his disciples, rather put it with Jibanananda's early poetry though very unsimilar in appearance, or Amiya Chakravarty's, or Buddhadeva Bose's poems to be soon put together in the book *Bandir Bandana*, or Bishnu Dey's to follow soon. The fact that Tagore read his early manuscripts and made a few corrections, or that he travelled with Tagore to North America, did not change matters.

Those other poems written in 1928 and recorded in the eighth notebook, also bore this mark. His brother Harindranath recalls his sending some of them, after his success with the monthly *Pravasi*, to the equally prestigious monthly *Bharatvarsha*, but *Bharatvarsha* turned them down. Later a few were included in his third book of poems, the fact that they did not jar there and read fairly consistent, showed that in style there was not all that difference between 1928 and 34 : Sudhindranath had already come of age. But something did make a difference : in 1929 during his trip to North America and Europe, his poetry had a sudden leap in experience—it became hundred percent authentic. And this he was not going to lose, his poetry might get sparse but the authenticity of experience would sustain it for the rest of his career. The fire that blazed in 1929 had come to stay.

Sudhindra packed his eighth notebook along with his personal effects for the trip with Tagore—and another, a new notebook. On 26 February they took the train to Bombay and on 1 March they embarked on "S.S. Naldera". In a press coverage *The Times of India* printed a photograph of Tagore with Sudhindra and Apurba Chanda. Their first stop was Colombo, and from there, via Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai, to Japan. Sudhindra seemed to have thought of a travel diary : after leaving Colombo he made an entry in the ninth notebook, the only entry. It was purely on a question of culture, on expectation of civilized standards from the Occident. The Occident had taught us liberalism and so when the Occidentals

themselves behaved illiberally out of blind habit, it had to be doubly deplorable. "If the Occident finds us dispensable after proper discerning, I won't complain ; but if it takes pity on us without any judgment at all, I would not tolerate that." Something must have happened to deserve such indignation : was Tagore involved ? Was it racial humiliation from the white fellow passengers or management ? Sudhindra was still an absolute admirer of the West, he might even condone racial distance but not arrogance. Later he would acquire a deeper understanding ; his unfinished autobiography for instance, written in his 56th year, would contain some very perceptive comments on the East-West relations. Anyway, this travel entry in early 1929 would prove prophetic a few weeks later : Tagore would be heckled by the United States Immigration on the west coast, so much so that he would suddenly cancel all his engagements and leave only after two days' stay.

They reached Japan on 22 March. Sudhindra went on a guided tour on his own and joined the others at Yokohama before leaving for Canada on 28 March on "S.S. Empress of Asia". They arrived at Victoria on 6 April and got to Vancouver on the 7th. On arriving in Canada Tagore also made plans to visit the United States from where he had got a number of invitations. And on 18 April they arrived in Los Angeles by train from Vancouver. The Los Angeles press splashed the news and a photograph of Tagore with Sudhindranath and Apurba Chanda was published : "Among India's foremost men..." Tagore was to lecture at the University of Southern California for six weeks, but suddenly on 20 April he left for Japan. Apurba Chanda went with him (Tucker stayed back in his own country), but Sudhindra stayed on. He thought of some lectures judging by a letter his father wrote to him about this time, went to Chicago before long and then east to catch a boat to Europe.

His travel entry was the only recorded writing he had

Even as the flashing exhilaration of a starless
monsoon night.'

Should you wish, forget me, dear,
And if you will,
Give me a moment of passive pity
In your evenings of wistful leisure ;
But remember, if you can, remember only this :
My bark, my lone bark,
Floating on the languid stream of befogged
monotony,
Was plunging into the depths of ambiguous despair,
When you, my lover,
My exotic lover,
Stretched out your arms in simple charity
And checked its constant career.

On reading these lines, on reading these poems, on reading all Sudhindranath's subsequent love poetry, one may wonder whether these were pure fabrications or had some real basis. If biography has any function at all in literary appreciation, then this is worthdigging. We cannot deny one thing : there was suddenly a change in his poetry. Who was she, the immediate cause of these poems ? Where did he meet her ? Was she German ? It would seem so from a later poem—the last two lines of "Samvarta" ("Cyclone") are evidence enough, let alone the description. Of course all this is internal evidence ; but when external evidence is missing this should do, especially if it is fairly substantial and consistent. Perhaps some day somewhere some external evidence will be unearthed, a bunch of letters maybe ; till then let us concentrate on the poems themselves, the words.

However there was some hearsay. It seems his friends knew, surely the inner circle, but not all of them paid much attention to it, since it was not uncommon for Indian youths on an occidental sojourn to have a passing affair.

But how far did it go in this case ? Supposing they met in Chicago where the first poem was written, did she travel east with him, and then further to Europe ? It is not unlikely that he wrote those four "Kshanika" sonnets while with her on the crossing. Or did he meet her again in Europe ? In London where he stayed some time and wrote another sonnet ? France and Belgium must have been very brief, but in Germany things got serious. The primary reason he went there was his appendix : he had decided to postpone the operation till return home, but his uncle Nirod Mallik, at Wiesbaden then, asked him to join him there for a check-up. The doctors suggested an immediate operation. It was done at the Krankenhaus Paulinenstift where he wrote three poems, dated September. While staying at the Kur Hotel, apparently with his uncle, before and after the operation, he wrote a few more. He must have arrived at Wiesbaden in July or August and left in October or November, for in early December he wrote the last two poems of the batch homebound on the Arabian Sea.

It has been recorded by Edward Shils in his introduction to the O.U.P. book—and Shils must have learned it from Sudhindranath himself—how while in Germany Sudhindranath was once accosted by some Hitler youths for not wishing them the "Heil Hitler". He answered humorously that since he was an "Urarrier" (original Aryan) he did not have to. Did it happen at Wiesbaden ? He was in Germany at a time when things were still looking fair, the euphoria of the Locarno Pact had not yet turned nightmarish and Stresemann's 'idealism' irrelevant ; but such was the dialectic that it was then that Hitler had his first rise—Sudhindranath would later call it a cataclysm lowering in the distant skies. Was not this incident one minor peal of thunder ? But it did not seem to have bothered him at the time, he took it rather comically, as he did a torch procession too he must have seen that summer in this small

town near Frankfurt-am-Main. But perhaps his perception of history was at the moment clouded by the intense personal experience ; if we take the internal evidence again, it was 'she' who mattered more.

Sudhindranath has written a most intense kind of love poetry ; and if a Bengali is asked to quote some lines of love from after Tagore, in many cases he will probably quote Sudhindranath. Incidentally the 'love' poems inspired by his wife are of a different flavour. They have desire, but also disenchantment from a fulfilment of desire : the impermanence there is not the impermanence of that which as such passes. Besides the *Tanvi* pieces are at times a bit contrived, at least seem so, whereas these poems all seem genuine. In their first drafts there were some local details, the river Rhein for instance, or pine woods, and mention of a "bideshini" (an alien woman) : later they have been changed in most cases to a Bipasha or a *palash* wood, and the bideshini has become in one place a mere "inamorata"—all this perhaps in a bid for 'generalization', but what could not be rarefied was the passion ; we have no doubt of its authenticity. Still if we need further internal evidence, we can refer to the first drafts.

Of course that is not our ultimate concern here, we are tracing his literary career and not checking up his laundry bills or some such banalities. But they do come quite handy at times since literary careers are not built in a vacuum. I am sure no one will contest that as such, it must be a question of emphasis and if I seem to be emphasizing the biography at this stage, it is because he was still largely forming, in other words, still subject to the primary causalities of experience more than to the secondary causalities of his own art. Once we arrive at them we may not have to labour the obvious thus. Besides we are often prone to equating genius with exemplary behaviour, or rather recoil from any signs of exception in a personality we revere. One of Sudhindranath's late essays was posthumously reviled for

violation of a taboo, let us not make a taboo in his own case and violate his spirit of truth.

But these fifteen poems I have been speaking of were not the only fruit of his trip to the Occident. That he should go on such a trip was almost inevitable of the Bengali upper class intellectual, a sort of extension of his English education; it was history in part that his nationalist uncle and father should discourage it at first, but it was also history that he should desire it so much. Besides he travelled with someone who had made a similar trip some five decades ago and had made his impressions memorable in a journal. As we know, Sudhindranath also began a journal but just began. However he wrote letters to his father who preserved them in spite of his usual habit of destroying all personal correspondence, and on Sudhindra's return handed him the whole bunch asking him to keep it for probable future use. I have not been able to trace these letters yet and so cannot tell what they contained. But surely authentic impressions. What did Sudhindranath feel about the white Occidentals? Mere admiration, or there was also a bit of censure? Was this spell of Western exposure euphoric, the dream come true, or was it also a painful experience with a hint of the brown man's burden? One would like to find out.

That sole entry in his incipient travel diary is somewhat revealing. To Sudhindranath Westernization was to be a positive process, to mean an inculcation of practical reason. Not only would a Bengali poet do better to assimilate the best Western poetry and poetics, but a society also would do wisely to adopt a good many of Western norms. The British Raj could not be an absolute evil then, surely; but the British Raj also meant a big dose of colonial humiliation. How could we have the one without the other? Later in life Sudhindranath would make more trips to the Occident, in the fifties—both his and the century's; he would also go to North America again. He would even at one time, at a

rather crucial moment of his life, think of moving to England. But generally he thought the absolute reverse : no self-respecting Indian should ever settle in the Occident.

But there was another aspect of this trip that we should not overlook : he travelled with Tagore—how did it go ? Surely he and Apurba Chanda were quite independence-loving (it seemed the two got along with Tucker quite well to start with) ; how did they get along with the great man ? Later at a *Parichay* gathering (we have it in Shyamalkrishna Ghosh's diary), apropos of Apurba Chanda's reported worthlessness during the trip, he remarked : "The poet is a very human, fussy, self-esteeming vain man after all." This was no slander for he often spoke this way. But this also revealed the affectionate and respectful distance he must have felt : that he came close to Tagore and yet did not turn into an absolute worshipper, was proof no doubt not of his perversity but self-respect. No, he was not an iconoclast, he had the greatest regard for the Olympian. But at the same time he belonged to a different generation and he was fully aware of it. Besides he was an honest man and his honesty did not exclude anybody, even himself.

Three

SUDHINDRANATH returned in December 1929 and in a few months got his first book out. But as we know, these were poems written much earlier except for the title poem which he wrote in early 1930—the last of the eighth notebook. These poems were reportedly shown to Tagore, and there is a copy with comments and revisions made apparently in Tagore's hand—Suchindra accepted most of the revisions but in some he retained the original or made further revision. And not all the poems shown were finally included in *Tanvi*, a few found their way into a later book. Anyway the poems he had just written had to wait. In the meantime he wrote more poems—all in the same vein—did translations, wrote essays, but perhaps historically more important, brought out a quarterly, the celebrated *Parichay*. But before turning to that and before looking in detail at the ninth notebook where most of his poems after return were recorded, let us take an initial look at the tenth. The front cover reads: "Oxford Book of Bengali Verse, III Part", and as we open we see copies made by Sudhindra of selections from Iswarchandra Gupta, Satyendranath Datta, Gobindachandra Das, Dwijendralal Roy—evidently discontinued. At this time he began work with Tagore on an anthology of Bengali verse for Oxford. This did not finally materialize, but he is said to have made quite a bit of selection. The rest of the tenth notebook contains poems and translations begun from the back.

One can write the history of a great deal of Bengali literature of the last one hundred years or so in terms of Bengali reviews, but this is especially true of the post-Tagore writings of the twenties and thirties of this century.

A review meant a new style, a new philosophy of writing and in most cases a new solidarity. Expressly or not, a review meant a new manifesto bearing the whole group's signatures, however distinct they may later develop as writers in their own rights. For instance the so-called trio of *Kallol* had very little in common beyond their term as its contributors, but whatever Achintyakumar Sengupta, Buddhadeva Bose and Premendra Mitra wrote at the time bore the unmistakable stamp of that review. Anyway if *Kallol* meant mainly a release of the inhibited sensibility, then *Parichay* came to mean a check, not to the sensibility as such but to its abandon, its almost unthinking euphoria. It is interesting that people used to the *Kallol* airs did not feel much at ease at *Parichay* and that the *Parichay* inner circle was perhaps a bit too highbrow for the camaraderie of *Kallol*, though there were a few amphibians. One may see here a binary structure, but this is not the place to go into the details of this or related history involving a number of other reviews which may or may not confirm the binariness. In any case when we take a look at the emergent post-Tagore writing and tend to identify it with *Kallol* and its like, we should remember *Parichay* as the antipodes.

Parichay began and thrived mainly as a critical review, somewhat like—the parallel has been repeatedly proposed—T.S. Eliot's *Criterion*. Its place in Sudhindranath's career is crucial, for not only did he found it and was its editor for the first twelve years, but during this tenure he was perhaps the most productive—wrote poems, wrote essays, made translations, brought out three books of poems and one book of essays, nearly half his total output. But this was not his only harvest from *Parichay*, for *Parichay* was not just a quarterly or monthly (quarterly the first five years and then monthly) issue from the printer's house and its needed preparation at the editor's desk, *Parichay* was also a literary club. Here people made intellectual friends, found new ideas and threw old ones away, got excited about

current events, tore to shreds the latest books or acclaimed their excellence, flaunted as much disregard as possible for the classics, yet perhaps granted them a certain permanence, talked argued quarrelled about practically anything and everything. Being the principal participant this gave Sudhindra a chance to air his ideas and cultivate wit : the later 6 Russell Street Sudhindranath whose prime reputation was as an intellect of the highest order and a fabulous tabletalker, had his origin in *Parichay*.

The story of how *Parichay* was started has been told by more than one, but perhaps the most detailed account is that by the late Hirankumar Sanyal whose *Parichayer Kudi Bachhar* (Twenty Years of Parichay), partly serialized in the magazine from its twenty-first year, has been recently issued in book form. But there are also the partly published journals of Shyamalkrishna Ghosh, absolutely priceless for the week to week record he kept. The initial scene was the Stephen House where the "Light of Asia Insurance Company", founded by Subodh Mallik, had its bureau and where there were also the offices of "Adair Dutt & Company", dealers in scientific instruments : Sudhindra was the secretary of the former (tenure 1930-33) and from an interest in gadgets like cameras and coffee percolators, soon made friends with Girijapati Bhattacharya who worked with the latter. And Girijapati introduced him to his friend Nirendranath Roy of whom Sudhindra had heard from Satyen Bose. With these newly made friends Sudhindra planned the review. To look after the editing and the printing a board of directors was set up : Charuchandra Datta, Satyen Bose, Subodhchandra Mukherjee, Prabodhchandra Bagchi, Dhurjatiprasad Mukherjee, Niren Roy, Girijapati Bhattacharya and Sudhindranath—Charu Datta, a retired civilian and Sudhindranath's uncle who provided a lot of initial encouragement, Subodh Mukherjee and Prabodh Bagchi from the "Société Indo-Latin" (a club mainly of France-returnees in the late twenties), and

Dhurjatiprasad, the only established writer of the group, as Girijapati's boyhood friend. They issued a brief announcement. The name *Parichay* (according to Harindranath Datta there was another name suggested by Sudhindranath, *Uttarphalguni*, but Charu Datta whose opinion carried weight preferred *Parichay*) was given by Niren Roy who also wrote the first editorial to explain its scope. The lettering on the cover was done by Girijapati, not just the design but the colour block as well. The editorial bureau was set up at the Stephen House and Kundabhushan Bhaduri of the Bharati Bhavan was appointed the printer. The first issue came out in Sravan 1338 B.S. (July-August 1931). It ran up to 154 pages.

Very few Bengali reviews had such a varied display of intellect : essays on philosophy, literature, politics, science and the fine arts ; by Hirendranath Datta, Prabodhchandra Bagchi, Sudhindranath Datta, Susobhan Sarkar, Satyendranath Bose, Subodhchandra Mukherjee, Hemendralal Roy ; review of 21 titles—literature, philosophy, politics, travels. Besides there was a story by Dhurjatiprasad Mukherjee ; and poems by Sudhirkumar Choudhury, Annadasankar Ray, Bishnu Dey and Buddhadeva Bose ; plus translation of a small section of Proust's *A la Recherche* by Bishnu Dey ; plus of course Niren Roy's editorial, and a letter from Birbal—that is, Pramatha Chaudhuri—on the practice of bringing out new magazines. There was nothing by Tagore, seemingly he had not been approached which was rather unique (Tagore appeared in the second number : a letter on the magazine and a review of Jagadish Gupta's book of stories, *Laghu-Guru*). Among the titles reviewed were Saratchandra's *Sesh Prashna*, Buddhadeva Bose's *Bandir Bandana* and first book of stories, Tagore's *Russiar Chithi*, Annadasankar Ray's *Pathe-Pravase*, a few French novels and an anthology of German stories ; and among the reviewers were Niren Roy, Girijapati, Dhurjatiprasad, Manindralal Bose and the editor himself. The "review"

section was unusually large for a Bengali magazine, in fact that became its most important contribution to the Bengali letters. Most of the reviews were review articles rather than mere mentions; and if *Kallol's* task was mainly to introduce new writings then *Parichay's* was to set up new standards. Girijapati's review of Buddhadeva Bose was a signal instance and proved that *Parichay's* sympathies were chiefly with those who were welcome to *Kallol*; it might have been "highbrow" because of its high standards and not because of an indifference to the new writing.

One of the principal features of *Parichay* was its broader scope: it reviewed not Bengali books alone but books in European languages as well, and published essays on subjects related to Europe too (for instance, in the first few years there was a series on the European political scene including the Russian Revolution and Italian Fascism). It also printed translations from European languages, in fact in the first few issues there was a separate section marked "Translation". Of course this broadness was limited, for anything outside Bengali meant occidental, almost nothing non-Bengali and contemporary Indian (Sanskrit and Pali were absolute past); but surely this was not peculiar to *Parichay* alone. This was the legacy of the Western impact on the Bengali letters; if *Parichay* highlighted this it was because *Parichay* was primarily a magazine of the intellect. It is now that we have grown aware of the other Indian literatures and are also doing translations from them, but in the thirties the things were still quite different. What however distinguished *Parichay*, and *Kallol* as well, is that unlike most of its predecessors its interest was not restricted to English.

If we make a classified index of the book reviews published, say, in the first five years—the term *Parichay* stayed a quarterly and maintained a good size—we shall see that they were of various genres of books, of literature as well as of history-economics-politics, philosophy, science,

travel and so on, which shows that though *Parichay* was primarily a literary magazine its scope was much larger, and that it did not promote literature for its own sake but firmly believed in its relevance to the other pursuits of the intellect. But this does not mean that *Parichay* was an omnibus, a kind of potpourri ; in spite of its broadness and an initial generosity of taste it had a tone of its own. The books surely were varied and the reviewers various, but the standard strived for was uniformly high and the attitude mostly modern. For instance in the reviews of books of history, economics and politics there was a general Marxist bias, not because the editor himself was a Marxist which he probably was not, but because the reviewers often were and the editor's choice of them was pretty consistent, which showed not simply his loyalty to friends but a liberalism that regarded Marxism as a scientific approach to social issues. We shall have occasion below to look into the question of Sudhindranath's relation to Marxism. It has been a rather vexed question and approached at times with hostility and at others perhaps a trifle patronizingly. But that *Parichay* should become a Marxist magazine after Sudhindranath, was not probably an accident. Besides, the allegation or the commendation that Sudhindranath's *Parichay* was a nursery of Marxism in Bengal, may not be a mere exaggeration.

Anyway, the literary reviews were on the whole modernist rather than being technically Marxist. Quite a few were done by the editor himself, and it is partly here that we see not simply his wide reading in contemporary literature and his relative catholicity of taste, but the emergence of an aesthetic by way of literary judgment. He did some rejecting and some commending—certain modern stalwarts fared rather badly in his hand whereas certain others, newcomers or unacknowledged superiors, got their unpaid due. Besides *Parichay* reviewed some Western masters quite early even by the Western standards—for

instance Faulkner in 1931 or Hopkins in 1937. If it was colonialism to give such importance to Western authors, then it was not colonialism of the usual kind which was importing a long-acclaimed classic or an over-ripe fashion fast passing in the West.

The second important contribution of *Parichay* was its essays. Here too there was a variety of subjects ranging from the purely speculative philosophical to the predominantly factual historical and sociological. In almost every issue—and we are speaking of the first twelve years alone—there was at least one on philosophy-metaphysics or religion, one on history or sociology, and one on literature. Besides there were occasional articles on science, on philology, on the fine arts, on biography and so on. In the first five years the highest number of essays were literary, but the philosophical-metaphysical-religious or historical-sociological—about the same number—not much fewer. The bulk of the philosophical-metaphysical essays were by Sudhindranath's father, but there were also Batakrishna Ghosh, Prabodh Bagchi, Abu Sayeed Ayyub and Humayun Kabir; the subjects were mostly Indian—Hindu and Buddhist—only a few Western. The historical-sociological essays were more varied; in addition to the above-mentioned series on the European political scene, there were essays on marriage, on manners, on education, including Tagore's famous piece "Kalantar" (Change of the Times) and Sudhindranath's own "Manusyadharma" (Humanism). Of the literary essays one cluster was on the metrics, a lively controversy the participants of which included Tagore, Dilipkumar Roy, Prabodhchandra Sen, Amulyadhan Mukherjee and the editor himself. Then there were pieces on modern writing in general, such as the above-mentioned "Kavyer Mukti" by Sudhindranath, his "Oitijhya o T.S. Eliot" (Tradition and T.S. Eliot) and Tagore's "Adhunik Kavya" (Modern Poetry).

The poetry and fiction published in *Parichay* was

comparatively slender, and there was hardly any drama except a translation once by the editor himself. This is where *Parichay* was unlike most other magazines ; whether or not one should call it a deficiency is another question, for *Parichay* had its acclaimed purpose and served that fairly consistently. But however slender it published most of the new poets and some contemporary fiction, only there was not much tonal unity except of course the very general one of modernity—the kind of focus, say, *Kallol* showed in fiction or *Kavita* was going to show in a few years in poetry. *Parichay* was not exactly a literary movement, it did not produce any poets or novelists as such—it will not be fair to claim that Sudhindranath himself was a product of *Parichay*—what it tried to do was foster judgment, establish the primacy of intellect in the matter of taste. In fact *Parichay* was one of the first magazines that did not do literature for its own sake but related it, consciously related it, to social, historical and philosophical issues—what is now called contextual criticism had perhaps its beginnings in Bengali in the pages of *Parichay*. It is not right to take Sudhindranath, because of his later indifference to Marxism, as a champion of the so-called “art for art’s sake” ; on the contrary he had a materialist bias, his sense of history was alert in whatever he wrote. As literary criticism as such one might find his celebrated “Kavyer Mukti” a trifle simple today, but it was one of the earliest attempts in Bengali to look at poetry socio-historically.

If we understand this apropos of the role *Parichay* played, then we shall also understand why *Parichay* was so serious about its Fridays, why its members thought no less of them than of the magazine itself. The literary *adda* or club has been a quite common feature of the Bengali literary scene, especially the one built around a magazine ; but very few perhaps had been so regular and had such a long life as these Fridays. It was not like just dropping in which might have been the norm in some cases, it was more like *Parichay*

at home. Initially the idea was to discuss the editorial and business affairs of the magazine, but that seemed to have become secondary soon—the only official thing that more or less continued for some time was assigning the books for reviews—and it turned out to be a purely intellectual *adda*. Three Fridays a month it met in Sudhindranath's drawing room at 139 Cornwallis Street, and on the fourth at Prabodh Bagchi's house in Ballygunge for the convenience of the members from the city south. Occasionally it was invited to other houses as well, chiefly Charu Datta's. The usual club hour was evening. Often it was full house, sometimes crammed full. In his autobiographical *Amar Jauban* (My Youth) Buddhadeva Bose has described his impressions of the Fridays thus—I am quoting him because though he did not fully appreciate the role of Sudhindranath's *Parichay* at the time, later did and became one of Sudhindranath's closest admirers in the last ten years or so of his life: "A speckless yellow or green floor, soft sofas, sparkling china, fine snacks—on some days the glorious big-size samosas, sweets etc. of North Calcutta, on others snacks ordered from Firpo's—everything in plenty. One by one would they come—all cultivated—masters in various branches of knowledge, having easy access to the most recent science and philosophy—all together a brilliant ensemble, of whom most brightly shone—in his looks, in his remarkable clothes—on some days in a handloom dhoti with a foot-wide border and finely folded, and on some others in the luxury of a Japanese kimono, with golden designs on a base of black—with his well-sounding voice and clear style, with his gift for conversation and easy sociability, the head of the clan, Sudhindranath Datta....As if a little too fine and prosperous and shining, as if no *adda*, an organized assembly—so it seemed to me." This from the co-editor of *Pragati* and one of the *Kallol* group, who was featured in the first issue of *Parichay* and favourably reviewed, commented upon in the second, who and whose friends however did not stay

on because of a small misunderstanding and yet continued to publish—is historically significant. One may contest this or that detail, but as a record of how the Fridays appeared to a section of the contemporary Bengali writers, especially the more revolutionary section, this was honest.

Who used to come? Of course there was a core, but besides that quite a few, irregularly or for a certain stretch, for the Fridays continued all through Sudhindranath's term as the editor and even afterwards. Hiran Sanyal has given a somewhat classified list: the ex-members of the Société Indo-Latin, the Oxford alumni, the Cambridge alumni, and the others including himself and the editor. A more exhaustive list emerges from Shyamalkrishna Ghosh's journals. Apart from the three originators—Sudhindranath, Girijapati and Niren Roy—and the early inducted—Dhurjatiprasad, Satyen Bose, Prabodh Bagchi—the core consisted perhaps of Hiran Sanyal, Shyamalkrishna (probably the most regular), Susobhan Sarkar, Basanta Mallik (everybody's "Mallikda" until he went back to Oxford), Shahid Suhrawardy, Humphry House, Bishnu Dey, Hiren Mukerjee, Apurba Chanda, Abani Banerjee, Kiran Mukherjee, Haritkrishna Dev, Humayun Kabir, Suren Goswami, Majid Rahim, Tulsi Goswami, Jibanmoy Roy, Abu Sayeed Ayyub, Sumantra Mahalanobis. Among the irregular attendants were Batakrishna Ghosh, Suren Moitra, Anathnath Bose, Hemendralal Roy, Jogesh Sinha, Sudhin Sinha, and the initial patron Charu Datta. Some of the early members who later dropped out were *Uttara's* Suresh Chakravarty who was also *Parichay's* manager for some time, Annadasankar Ray, Sudhirkumar Choudhury, and one of the early enthusiasts, Subodh Mukherjee. Pramatha Chaudhuri came occasionally. For some time Jamini Roy came regularly. Among the other artists and art critics who came sometimes were Atul Bose, Satish Sinha, O.C. Ganguly and Amiya Ganguly. The ex-Meerut-convict Radharaman Mitra also came a few times, and once or twice P.C. Mahalanobis.

Atulchandra Gupta never came, but he was a friend of *Parichay*. Members at various later stages, but during Sudhindranath's tenure, included Samar Sen, Lindsay and Mrinalini Emmerson, Mrinalini's sisters Sheila and Anila, Lila Roy (later Majumdar), Arun Sen, Chanchal Chatterjee, Jyotirindra Moitra, Asok Mitra, Subhas Mukherjee, Priyaranjan Sen, Nandagopal Sengupta, Abani Chatterjee. Malcolm Muggeridge came for a spell, earlier, and so did M.N. Roy, later. And there was a civilian Hughes who spoke Bengali and who might have been keeping an eye on the intellectuals. As mentioned above, *Kallol's* trio came only a few times, Manish Ghatak and Ajit Datta a bit more. Amiya Chakravarty came once or twice. Even the great Prafulla Ghosh of Calcutta University once came. There were also distinguished guests, such as the Japanese poet Noguchi and Sarojini Naidu more than once; E.M. Forster, Lin Yutang, Needham and Burnell. And although Tagore never came he invited the group to Jorasanko once or twice. On one occasion the invitation arrived a little too late and, as recorded by Shyamalkrishna, Sudhindra said, "He is the past and the present, but we are the future."

From this list—and the list can be supplemented—it is clear that *Parichay* attracted intellectuals of all sorts but more those who were open to new ideas, and that its character was quite cosmopolitan—there were some among the regular members who did not speak Bengali, including Shahid Suhrawardy who was a Bengali by birth; the usual language of conversation was English. The thrust of the *adda* was intellectual and so long as Basanta Mallik was there, he tried to rescue the Fridays from levities. He was a philosopher, so he might have geared the conversation to speculative issues; but naturally philosophy was not the only topic. There was literature; and more, there was politics, and if we look up Shyamalkrishna's journals we can see that the political issues which were nearest their heart were varied, the most immediate as well as the most distant,

Bengal politics as well as the politics of Mussolini. However, there was a focus in all this and one of the views that came to be voiced more and more, was Marxist, not necessarily the view of the house or the magazine, for the magazine did not have a single view. And that did not bother the editor, for he was a true liberal.

I want to stress this, for Sudhindranath was never really a 'pure' poet in the right or the wrong sense. His interest in political and economic history, in the history of ideas as such, even in the natural and biological sciences and in such logical method as Mathematics, was not only genuine but concomitant to his poetry—that is, in appreciating the latter we should not dismiss the former as a dilettante's dabbling. In the late forties it was he who urged M.N. Roy to write down his reading of European history and in part planned the book, the two-volume *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*. In fact what emerges from his prose and poetry is an attempt at a view of history, a part of which is reflected in the very style he wrote, broadly dialectical, no less in poetry than in prose.

Next to socio-political controversies what the Fridays featured most were literary and art controversies. Which was the better kind of painting, Abanindranath Tagore's and Nandalal Bose's, or Jamini Roy's? Sudhindranath and Shahid Suhrawardy would put the former below because it was a bit too illustrative, Niren Roy would defend illustrative painting: does not all painting have a frame of reference outside the canvas? One of the literary issues was the prose poem. Most questioned it, including Sudhindranath—of course they made an exception in the case of Tagore, he alone knew how to turn prose into poetry. But voicing this once in a review Hiran Sanyal attracted severe criticism from Buddhadeva Bose, one of the staunchest champions, which created a stir at *Parichay*. Nevertheless there was one there, Niren Roy, who defended the enfants terribles—not only on this, on several other occasions as well.

Throughout the thirties the Fridays and *Parichay* maintained their spirit and their glory, only the latter changed in 1936 to a monthly. It was regularly issued and the Fridays met regularly; besides the core the contributors and the attendants kept slowly changing, a healthy sign for a literary magazine and a literary club. But when the War came Sudhindranath had a crisis. This overlapped with a personal crisis. The result was, his concern for the magazine and interest in the club both dwindled. Hiran Sanyal, who had become the joint editor from the tenth number of the ninth year, had to do most of the editing; and Sudhindranath stayed away more and more from the Fridays. Finally the things took such a shape that he gave up, but instead of folding them he himself moved out.

Four

SUDHINDRANATH'S second book of poems, *Orchestra*, came out in 1935. It was followed in 1937 by his third book *Krandasi* and in 1940 by his fourth *Uttarphalguni*, and between these two in 1938 by his first book of essays *Svagata*. Besides he had been doing translations from German, French and English poetry which he would later revise and put together in a book. For a poet whose total output was six books of poems, one book of translations, two books of essays and a few fragments, to achieve all this in a decade or so was indeed remarkable. Years later while preparing the second edition of *Orchestra*, he would be himself surprised to recall that even his pen was once fluent—no wonder for by then his pen would have suffered, as it were, a paralysis.

There were twenty-five poems in *Orchestra* of which eleven were from the poems written on his North American cum European trip, poems mentioned above. The chronology was : these eleven plus fourteen written after return—8 May to 10 December 1929, and 14 April 1930 to 30 January 1933. Not all the poems written after return were however included, some found their way into *Krandasi*, a few theirs into *Uttarphalguni*. The *Orchestra* poems were all about a single experience, the poems which were based on varied experience would naturally have to wait. Anyway, there should not be any doubt about what that single experience was : *Orchestra* is one of the best batches of love poems from after Tagore.

Here was the book's blurb, apparently written by the author himself :

In his first book of poems *Tanvi's* foreword the author called himself a shadow of his predecessors.

Yet even Tagore found an unusual originality in those poems. *Orchestra* is more original ; in form, flavour, rhythm and figures the book is so varied that everyone will agree with the connoisseur that Sudhindranath is truly a pioneer of present Bengali literature. For though there is no lack of a classical atmosphere in *Orchestra*, yet everywhere it is restrained ; there is also the most modern intellectuality though in a temperate measure ; and the expression which the total experience of the poet's prime of life has found in a close commingling of these two qualities, is as much fit as full of relish. But *Orchestra* wishes alert readers. *Orchestra* is composed for those who can take subtle hints of craft, who do not indulge in an unreal fancy for the subject-matter, who are not used to avoiding the profoundest human feelings for the sake of age-old customs, and especially for those who prefer genius in art. The title poem is an unforgettable creation, its rival is rare in not Bengali literature alone but in Western literature as well.

This was an advertisement, Sudhindranath would not have else spoken so glowingly of his own poetry ; in fact in his preface to the second edition he would speak quite critically of these poems :

For the poem which is rich in an experience of its own has of itself an individual expression ; and in *Orchestra* not only has more than one line been lifted from Tagore consciously or unconsciously, but its medium also is that twilight language halfway between the chaste and the vulgar in which most Bengali poems of the day were written. Besides, *Orchestra* was full of the usual anarchisms of Bengali verse such as the distortion of words for the need of rhymes and of metre too, the dialectal forms of verbs or the expansion or contraction of syllables to fill a foot, the repetitions of the verbs 'to be' and 'to do', and the unnecessary excess of vocatives ; and just as its heroine, in spite of her being a young woman of the twentieth century, is adorned with anklets and other antique jewels, so also is there often a clear influence of Sanskrit rhetoric in the conversation and conduct with her.

Eliot has called the poet a catalyst ; and I also think that to depict the racial conscious in the individual mind is the supreme achievement of a poetic career. But one cannot attain that union simply by ignoring the nature of his own time ; he who wants to approach that union, will have to view his own experience as well as the racial conscious as symbols ; and although to one who has that vision my beloved and Kalidasa's inamorata are the same, the basis of that sameness is not the transferable disguise, but the impersonal quality of love. On the other hand, the experience of *Orchestra* does not arise from any essence ; it is in order that its details too be forever impressed on the memory that the mind is going round and round it so ceaselessly ; and the independent being of this beauty gathered from the bits was not revealed at the time simply because the author's attachment to it was excessive. That is, the identity of expression and intuition is absent from *Orchestra* ; and therefore, despite the inspiration of an intense and brief passion, its irregular verse is often slack.

Nevertheless a few claims of the first edition blurb do have a certain validity, for however excessive *Orchestra's* experience is genuine—and it was on that ground that Tagore had approved it and found everything preceding it rather artificial—and however faulty, *Orchestra's* poetic is rather new in Bengali. If one thing, there is a conscious avoidance of inspiration and although the subject-matter is passion, intense passion, it is with conscious control that that passion is kept within bounds. The control is not simply of form which is flexible enough to fit the passion's sway—the Bengali *payar* is indeed a fabulous measure ; the control is also in the way the poem's experience is held. Let us take a poem, one of the more memorable ones : "Nam" ("Name").

Even now it's you, and you alone I want
 Even now I cry
 Voiceless into the ears of vacancy
 That lecking you,

Intolerable is my present, my future locked in gloom,
 And death my sole redress.
 Within an infinite hopelessness
 Around an aimless orbit you pull me still, my love.
 Wearied of motion, like the husk of a spent-out star,
 My eyes can catch but the sickly gleam of a past.
 And in my waking dreams
 All that exists is you and memories.

And yet my heart
 Rejects the comfort of lies.
 A mirage, I know, you are,
 Beyond my grasp where life with life is mingled.
 No one, I know, can share the weight of my
world ;—

This world foredoomed, which I have made
 Will crush me out some day
 And itself dissolve in void.

Futile, I know,
 Futile that glorious evening
 When, fixed on me, your fathomless eyes
 Overflowed with fruit-bestowing Swati's holy water.
 For I on that woodland path avowed
 Merely a long-accustomed love ;
 Cheating myself, your depths I did not probe,
 And littered mine with falsity.
 Many a time, in like impatience caught,
 Blushes to maiden cheeks I had brought ;
 Tempted by the moment's bloom,
 Amazed ashokas I had rudely bent
 Upon those others' feet. But in sun and rain and
wind

Their faded footprints now are lost,
 And at the epoch's end
 Remembrance of you will also come to dust.

And yet it's you I want, and you alone.
 Yet now in this ghost-inhabited cell
 My anguish dishonours the inexpressible ;
 And endless sense of loss recites your mighty name—
 Name—your name—but the name.¹

The first movement is balanced by the second, the third which is a variation on the second, by the fourth, a variation on the first. The first and second alone could not have been the poem, for structure the third and fourth were necessary. Anyway, the dual *ab* (*abb₁a₁*) as experience meant intensity and impermanence. There was an incipient dialectic here which would develop in his later poetry, a dialectic that not merely explains human history but also personal predicaments. Impermanence would gradually emerge as the most consistent theme of Sudhindranath's poetry, but there cannot be any point in impermanence without an intensity of feeling. Love is necessarily intense and necessarily impermanent—such is the experience here.

The title poem is indeed an achievement even though the claim made in the first edition blurb that it is absolutely unparalleled, is exaggerated. Sudhindranath's longest poem (329 lines), this was begun on 25 January and finished on 11 February of 1932. It has seven parts and each part has three movements, and these seven three's are laid out in a variety of rhythms—if for nothing else, for that alone the poem deserves credit—which, in Buddhadeva Bose's view, was Sudhindranath's form of free verse. The poem was a favourite of Sudhindranath's as is evident from his preface to the second edition :

... the first critics of *Orchestra* did not find in the title poem even a hint of that harmony which is the main aim of Western symphonic music ; and although in their comments I do not see as much as

1 Though there is also a translation by the poet himself in print, I am using this, by Buddhadeva Bose, for it seems closer to the original.

an attempt to understand the difference between musical concord and serenity of mind, I wholeheartedly confess that in none of the following poems is there even a trace of that perception, the infallible expression of which is true poetry. But the multiform poem entitled "Orchestra" represents, despite the lack of help from words, the seven steps of the marriage of body and soul ; and as its seven parts are a stairway to the height of movement, so is each part in turn a moment's union of three perceptions. That is, in each part recurs the scene inside the theatre, the unheard evocations of the audible concert, and the collected emotional associations of a particular listener ; and in the triple stream of the whole poem not only does an entire day's experience seek release, but there—perhaps elsewhere in the book, too—the union also of outer nature and the inner self, of the earthly and the unearthly, is implied.

Twice again Sudhindranath would try something similarly ambitious, something with a narrative or a dramatic intent in the lyric frame ; both "Samvarta" and "Jajati" would prove a better success. The reason for "Orchestra"'s relative lack of success might be a relative lack of ironic distance. In fact these three poems, a decade or so apart from one another, can perhaps be taken as three major landmarks in his literary career and read together reveal most of his meaning.

Of the other *Orchestra* poems not mentioned above one deserves special mention, a poem by the name of "Saswati" (The Eternal Woman), often anthologized. Let me try an inept translation of some of its more crucial lines :

Once on such a rain-past night—
 Was it a hundred births ago ?—
 She came and suddenly put her hand in mine,
 Looked in my eyes in a natural tenderness.
 That night too a billowy breeze like this
 Was playing with her locks' gold crop :

All craving and fulfilment of endless ages
Moved to search her bent-down glance.
On one word's throbbing, hesitant crest
Came to perch the seven heavens ;
One moment stood across the way,
And ever-running time stopped ;
The unbound abandon of one promise
Pulled down the polestar to earth ;
The mortal folly of one remembrance
Let loose the deluge.

...

The full river represents her passion,
From depths rising in endless seas lost ;
Her heart mirrored in the speckless sky :
Arcturus a jewel for her crowning.
The dreamy night blue like her eyes ;
The soft of her down in the pasture ;
On my tongue again 'my dearest' ;
But she loves someone else today.
The memory-ants are thus piling
Dead joy-grains in holes of dark :
Let her forget, in eons to come.
I will not, I will not ever forget.

Incidentally, these lines and the lines quoted above are all taken from the revised *Orchestra* which he was getting ready for a third edition. This was another aspect of Sudhindranath and in his preface to the second edition he put in a word of self-justification : "... however may the lapses, failings and errors of *Orchestra* shame me today, had I held back the poems from reprinting, it would have expressed only a needless self-respect, as refraining from a revision of them would also have denoted a lack of formal discernment and contempt for the reader. For we publish in hope of readers ; and the reader is not at all bound to excuse any lack of effort in our writing. On the other hand,

I refuse to raise *Orchestra* to my present level of writing ...”

He began revisions for *Krandasi* (The Heavens) too which were posthumously incorporated in his Collected Poems. Sudhindranath's third book was dedicated to Humphry House and contained an epigraph from Plato's *Phaedrus*. The blurb (like *Orchestra's* this too was probably the author's own) read :

It is hard to say how large Sudhindranath Datta's readership is. But probably there is no disputing that his place is in the first row of the Bengali poets. For even his adverse critics have unhesitatingly accepted his originality of thought and variety of expression and his admirers have not spared even indecent exaggerations about his earlier book of poems, *Orchestra*. To us the author's qualities are more manifest in the present volume. *Krandasi* is rich in the expression of those aspects of Sudhindranath's many-sided sensibility which were left out of *Orchestra* in maintaining a unity of subject and tone in the whole book. The occurrence of Nature and the beloved may be rare in these poems ; but the sensitive expression of the contexts which have found prominence here, is not easily available in at least Bengali poetry. So in the strength of this alone should *Krandasi* get a good reception, if not for its other qualities.

The number of poems was twenty-five of which five were from before the North American cum European trip, the rest postdated. Among those five was that poem on the cock, “Kukkut”, with which Sudhindranath had practically made his debut ; the earliest however was a poem originally meant for *Tanvi*, dated 12 Phalgun 1334 B.S.—that is, early 1928. The other nineteen were laid out between early 1931 and late 1934, quite a few thus were concurrent with the *Orchestra* poems. Whether or not the claim in the blurb is fully justified, the poems of *Krandasi* are more probing, more full of doubt and despair. The subjects are doubtless varied, but there is a tonal unity which gives the book its shape. A number of poems are about the self and

a number of others are about the reality outside, and both are, as it were, put in perspective by a few poems on God. It was here that the characteristic gloom of Sudhindranath's poetry was first pervasively and profoundly felt. A short poem called "Samapti" ("The End") would perhaps illustrate this best :

This gloomy day of rain I spent in reverie.
 Throwing ajar the gates of my heart,
 I made an easy passage for memories.
 With sightless eyes I saw
 Another day like this, framed in the curving sky ;
 In the rain's endless lamentation
 Heard the tender greeting of that voice.
 The fury of the storm as it pressed upon the
shutters
 Echoed the impotent rage of my ruined heart
 Against a harsh, indifferent, silent God.
 Rain ceased as evening came ;
 The twilight's dying flame
 With life's last effort, suddenly flashed
 The signal for extinction.
 And then darkness spread
 Within, without, its winding sheet.

No hope, it seemed,
 No words to tell of this caged defeat.
 It seemed that Death was closing in,
 Narrowing its circles in slow manœuvres.
 Scurrying like a mouse in its hole,
 Putrid crumbs I had stored through all my years
 In my miser's coffers
 But now the game was up,
 Closed the executioner's trap,
 And soon the cleansing blade will fall
 Annihilating all my beggarliness.¹

1. Trans. Buddhadeva Bose.

Not gloom alone as such, also anguish, also nausea. Here are some snatches :

1. God, O God, are you simply an empty name ?
Are you really not there ?
Are you really
A false nightmare of the forest fools ?
(“Prashna” : The Question)
2. Almighty,
Almighty inherited from the foregone century,
Give back, give me back the unflinching faith of
my elders,
So that like my ancestors
I too can happily think that, bought, subjugated,
You are my attendant slave. (“Prarthana” : The Prayer)
3. Full of nausea
My unsouled body lying in the earthly hell.
In mute darkness
Rapacious nightwalkers gorge their fill in it.
Endless, endless, I know, is my suffering, unendurable, endless.
So it seems
That self-defence is ludicrous, resolution mere
boasting,
The essence of life is to be fed to the ghouls,
To bear unflinching and unprotesting
Corpses’ company and the good will of jackals.
(“Narak” : The Hell)

But it would be wrong to say that nowhere in *Krandasi* were this gloom, anguish and nausea overcome ; there was at least one poem where they were. “Utpakhi” (“Camel-Bird”) is the first poem of the book and the last written (22 October 1934)—if one is to select, say, ten best poems of Sudhindranath, this will probably be one. It won an immediate audience, so much so that his friend Suren

Goswami, a Marxist, felt that it was a great poem by any standards. Sudhindranath himself made a translation.

You hear me well : and yet you try
To hide within the desert's fold.
Here shadows shrink until they die,
While dead horizons cannot hold
The quick mirage, and, never near,
The cruel sky is mute and blue.
The hunter stalks no phantom deer ;
He loses all by losing you.
The sands are heedless. Why run on,
When tell-tale footprints point your way ?
Your prehistoric friends are gone,
And, all alone, you stand at bay.

By brooding on a broken egg
You cannot hatch or make it whole :
The self-consuming hunger's peg,
You play in void a dual role.
Become, instead, my wilful ark
Upon the chartless sea of sand ;
For danger you refuse to mark,
Although you know the lie of land.
Come, let us seek a new retreat,
Enclosed in thorn and scorched all through,
Where water trickles, though not sweet ;
The earth brings forth a date or two.

No wishful creeper shall I grow
To creep your iron cage concealed,
Nor call in hucksters who would know
What price your useless wings should yield.
With moulted feathers I shall make
A fan to suit the anchorite,
But out of fibrils never rake

The dust once raised by stars in flight.
 My apprehensions shall prevail :
 Your runic cry will not suborn :
 For you are not the Nightingale
 Who lulls to feed on mortgaged corn.

This ruin is our inheritance :
 A line of spendthrifts went before ;
 They picked the pounds, and left no pence :
 Now both of us must pay their score.
 And so your self-absorption seems
 Inept : can blindness cheat a curse ?
 The present is no time for dreams :
 By shunning me you make bad worse.
 Let each of us then seal a bond
 To serve the other's interest :
 You speed me to the world beyond,
 While I propose the human test.

Surely as a symbol of the self-centred middle class the ostrich was quite apt and the poem had a lot of relevance to the thirties. But Sudhindranath's poems are particularly difficult to translate, for there is much stress here on the sound. How can a line like "andho hole ki prolay bandho thake ?" survive ?

Most of the poems of Sudhindranath's fourth book *Uttarphalguni*¹ were written in 1933, only two in 1932—within the *Orchestra* period—and two others in 1937. He hardly wrote any poetry in 1934 except the just quoted first poem of *Krandasi*, and apparently none in 1935-36. However in 1934 he did some translations from Shakespeare and I have been able to locate two revisions in 1936 of two earlier Mallarmé translations. Anyway it would be wrong to think that 1935-36 were relatively barren, for he wrote quite a

1. *Uttarphalguni* is a star, the twelfth of the twenty-seven in the Indian astronomical count.

bit of prose for *Parichay* in addition to doing a translation of a short play of Yeats's, *The Resurrection*—it was still five or six years before he would hit that crisis. As a matter of fact *Uttarphalguni* was published on the brink of it, it was going to stay his last book for thirteen years.

Uttarphalguni was dedicated to Sumantra Mahalanobis, a friend, and contained nineteen poems. It looked a lesser book than both *Orchestra* and *Krandasi*; it did not have the former's intensity of experience or the latter's profundity of doubt; still it had a consistency of tone worth the noting. The main subject seems to be love, but a later love, almost necessarily an inferior experience. The tone was set by the first poem, the very last written, "Sarvari" (Night). Here are the crucial lines:

All on a sudden the autumn evening like an aged
whore
 Covered the sure spread of decay with excessive
paint. ...
 So I told her full confidently that evening—
 Let yellow leaves fall on autumn's assault;
 Snow pile in trackless bowers of love;
 Wandering swans fly away from dried-up lakes
 In search of cheerful nests beyond the seven seas;
 Yet nothing will lose. In death's undying transforma-
tion
 Memory's Egyptian seed after right ripening in eons
 Will bring forth in the orchard of wishful creepers
the miracle flower.
 Time annihilates, but time too has faith in self;
 So in its cave reflections earth lamp after earth lamp
will have
 A breezeless, flickerless glow ...

Centuries pass. In that celebrated cave
 Bats build their home gradually; in nooks

Owls concentrate on rats ; in corners prudent jackals
 Hide half-eaten corpses ; around the overturned deity
 Earthworms gather ; at times a contented lump
 Relieves its heartburns sitting at the thorny door.
 In their excrement and lymph the past's perfect

emblem

Is ever buried ; in salt air the lime coat has come off
 And the skeleton rock wears a grin. The city rich,
bored,

Once in a while come for a picnic there
 With friends and whores ; flashing torches after food
 Stare at the wall where the desecrated trunk
 Presses Vaidehi's thigh ; at dusk leaving torn leaves
and broken tins

Go back to town. The evening's gloom increases
 With scattered coal and ashes, the fatigue of the
finished feast.

Then rises a wind, the evening star is suddenly lost,
 In nightmare's disarray a blind ruin alone stays up
through night.

One of the other poems was a variation on Tagore's "Golden Boat"—a characteristic variation for while in Tagore there was a duality of the deed and the doer and the impermanence of the latter meant the permanence of the former, in Sudhindranath both headed for the same impermanence.

Death, your wild boat is
 Anchored again ?
 Your alien flute I hear
 In the wilderness ? ...

When first you came,
 My load was heavy ;
 I hadn't yet known that life's essence
 Was only to seek you ...

Hadn't seen in shoreless seas,
Mortal men lived on islands alone ;
In vain a desperate jetty,
No steering in dark ;
Hadn't known that laughing and weeping
Were equal, eternal thirst a dream. ...

Don't say this time, friend, don't,
 "No room in loaded boat."
 Rock the waves' swaying swing
 At my moveless feet.
 Pour storms in windless sail.
 Wake up thunder above
 In lashing downpour of wholesome rain
 Wash my body's dust.
 Throwing peril all around
 Pull me up in your boat, friend.
 ("Marantarani" : Death's Boat)

This image of the boat he would go on using. Equally characteristic was another poem, this time a variation on Ronsard. "Quand vous serez bien vieille" became "When your lustrous locks will become snow-white / That erect prime body like a tuberosc stick / Will look dustward ...". And then

night—

If him who had desired you in the full moon's unbound
overflow,

You had offered your lissom body for a moment,
There would not have been the least difference in the
last disaster ?

Will you realize that in that crisis our self-control
And our abandon are indifferential to the indifferent
God ... ? ("Vilay" : Annihilation)

Decay, ruin, impermanence. Love could be true, but only here and now, and in the face of sure disaster. Another characteristic poem of *Uttarphalguni* was of the title "Duhsamay" (Hard Times) :

We met at the most inauspicious moment,
Approaching cosmic disaster. ...

Don't you know, undaunted girl, even if
Our childish dream be true today,
Even if this envious society of nincompoops
Pardon an unearthly union of two,
Yet all is in vain. —Our own undying past
Will in a sudden earthquake ruin the grounds of
faith ..

Still there is no going back at all,
You I want in body and mind....

Darkness deepens, none beside but you,
Terror piles up in skies.
Avert the greedy destiny in a proud defiance,
Put your hand in mine, fearless girl....

This then was Sudhindranath's fourth book of poems. As to the translations he did in the thirties and would later put together in a book, let us simply note here that he began them as early as 1930, that the first batch he did was from Heine's German, that interspersed with them were a few English and a few French poems and a few other German poems as well, that the last batch was from Shakespeare's sonnets, and that he was going to revise them all thoroughly. We may also note that sometime in 1931 he began a translation of *Oedipus*, obviously from an English version, of which he only did some four pages or so—an interesting attempt keeping in mind that within a few

years he would try, successfully; another play, Yeats's *The Resurrection*.

I have mentioned above the prose he had been writing for *Parichay* and collected in a book in 1938. This was *Svagata* (Asides), his first book of essays. It was dedicated to Dhurjatiprasad Mukherjee and contained nineteen essays besides the foreword. Of these nineteen two were on Tagore, three on other Bengali writing, the rest on Western literature. In the second edition, issued in 1957 and the edition we are going mainly to refer to here, the number was reduced to fifteen: the five Bengali essays were taken out and instead one more Western essay was added and, further, a fitting postscript. The Bengali essays were included in his other book of essays also published in 1957. The two Tagore essays were one on Tagore's prosody and the Bengali metre, and the other on Tagore's poetry in general. The three other Bengali essays were one on a post-Tagore Bengali novel, another on a post-Tagore Bengali poet, and the third a review of a book on the Bengali metre. Of the other essays only three were originally published as full-fledged essays, the rest were book reviews. "The Emancipation of Poetry" has been mentioned above and so have "Tradition and T.S. Eliot" and the pieces on Faulkner and Hopkins. Besides these there were essays on Edith Sitwell and Robert Frost; W.B. Yeats; D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf; Paul Morand, André Maurois and François Mauriac; Hermann Broch and John Dos Passos; Maxim Gorky; Arthur Calder-Marshall and Gian Dauli; Aldous Huxley and F.D. Ommanney (added in the second edition); Bernard Shaw; Lytton Strachey; Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound.

Sudhindranath introduced *Svagata* with these words—I am quoting the first two paragraphs of his foreword:

Among friends my writing is censured as unintelligible. My well-wishers think that the untouchable style I have created by cross-breeding the Sanskrit

and English languages should not be allowed even into the dance-hall of the Bengali Muse; and since my lack of self-confidence is the very reason why my superiors scold me, I am unable to ignore that unreasonable slander as baseless. So I am informing at the outset that the word 'svagata' is not a printing error for 'svāgata' (welcome), that stage-direction ā la Kalidasa after travelling to England has been established in Bengali drama from the pre-Michael times: when the oversize characters of those days were unable for natural inertia to express their opinions in acts and deeds, their intention then was communicated to the audience by means of this parenthesis.

Unfortunately I too am one of those cripples. At the time of life when normal men make money or save up their passage to after-life by social work, at that inauspicious moment due to the angry wink of Saturn I developed the terrible symptoms of verse-making. The horoscope also revealed that at that time Jupiter was favourable to me. So the disease did not take a terrible turn in my case, the reins were held after a phase of exercise. But fortune has a sense of humour; and only at seeing that health will not be of any use any more, it cures man of illness. Therefore in my case too before learning prosody properly the fountain of poetry was altogether dried up; and though what survived was called "the divine discontent" by the celebrated Romantics of the nineteenth century, still in that designation I at least have not found anything other than self-pity.

The translation is not adequate enough to reveal the characteristics of Sudhindranath's prose. Whether or not cross-bred it is unlike anything else in contemporary Bengali—largely Sanskritic in nouns and adjectives, even conjunctions, but colloquial Bengali in verbs, formal yet familiar. It is a difficult prose, demanding and yet pleasurable. Close-knit, it almost feels like a many-faceted compound. Besides its cohesion is logical. The sentences are often structured dialectically, an argument picking up a counter-argument and that again its opposite. The usual

post-Tagore Bengali prose is facile, expansive, capable of a lot of incidental flashes but often unpredictable and slack. Sudhindranath's prose is the product of hard work ; what he himself said about his aversion to inspiration in connection with poetry, applied no less to his prose : it is equally full of instances where the rather effusive 'gone away in flight' has been transformed to 'flying'. In fact the allegation that Sudhindranath is an obscure writer is made more against his prose than poetry ; for one may expect a little obscurity in poetry, but for prose to be obscure is extraordinary. However if one makes the initial effort, it fetches a lot of relish. Here are a few of the openings :

1. André Maurois once said that Aldous Huxley was the weather-cock of the West : he turned at even a hair-breadth turn of the taste-wind. But that was a long time ago ; the post-War Europe had then lost her senses in an excess of fashionable intellectuality ; and all talents announced in a chorus that no attitude suited them except a suicidal cynicism. After that in a terrible storm everything has been toppled and turned there, not only has every non-conformist flag been trampled in the dust, but one such has even been flung beyond the seven seas into the relaxed airs of New Mexico where it has no use. Yet the above comparison of Huxley is valid up to now ; and though at present he does not drift with the tide, it is the pressure-recording barometer that is still his analogy. Still now he is the unerring master of our hollow ennui ; at least most distortions of the Western mind follow his prophecies. However in the meantime the difference between him and Europe has disappeared ; he is indeed the unrivalled representative now of his time and place ; and therefore he does not run any more in front in fear of lagging behind, because the attitudes of this age are in the very marrow of his bones, knowing him is for us getting a good grasp of all things today. ("Guruchandal" : Chaste and Vulgar)
2. On losing patience with the heroics of the Paris Commune Gustave Flaubert sought protection in the ivory tower of autonomous art. For he thought

that though on that windy peak the grip of cold was severe, the stars all around were there undimmed, the animal shrieks of the mob a rare probability. But even with his disillusion in democracy Flaubert doubted monarchy ; and as he could not hold it out with the present, so could the vision of the past and future too not soothe him. Therefore in spite of such objective correlative from craft he was not the last descendant of the classicists, but a pioneer of the all-too modern Romantics ; therefore he was dispassionate yet a nihilist, unruffled but unworthy of the title impersonal ; therefore though his sanity was celebrated, his spiritual disciple Maupassant died of insanity. In fact the end of self-glorification is in the supraconscious perception of I-am-He, where proportion or harmony is pointless and unnecessary ; and since the nature of reason is to establish agreement between more than one person, Nietzsche's superman, like the one and the only God, is indifferent to equity. ("Wyndham Lewis o Ezra Pound")

3. Though the necessary persecution of unique geniuses is the only hope of unfortunate poet-aspirants, yet the primacy of originality is undisputed in literary history ; and in recent research not even a trace of that legend of neglect of Shakespeare has survived which once used to provide the subject of sentimental lectures to the rising authors—by exorcising that eccentric nineteenth century fancy the modern scholars have rather begun to persuade that it is doubtful if such wholesale success in such a short time was available to anyone other than Shakespeare. However the self-complacency of worthless authors is still indulged by the injustice once done by the established critics to Chatterton and Keats. But we are no longer curious about Chatterton for writing tolerable poetry at a tender age, he interests us because he could fool an experienced man like Walpole ; and the old attitude to Keats has altered not by virtue of his poetic qualities alone, but because on collecting his scattered letters one by one the post-Matthew Arnold generation is gradually realizing that this great poet was outside that eccentric circle in his disposition as well. ("Gerard Manley Hopkins")

Of course it is hard to get an idea of Sudhindranath's essays from these excerpts which again are translations; these may merely induce the reader to look up the original. And by way of further introduction let us simply note that though there have been some attempts to imitate his style, there has not yet been a Sudhindranath school. As to the content, that is, his taste, I have made a comment above. Let me add that a number of the *Svagata* essays are each about two dissimilar kinds of writing. The fairly early "Dhrupad-Kheyal" (Classic and Romantic), for instance, is in the main a relative assessment of Robert Frost and Edith Sitwell where the preference goes to the former. In another essay D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf are viewed together, and in yet another—I just quoted its opening—Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound. Sudhindranath's sense of literary history, no less than his sense of history in general, is, I think, essentially dialectical.

It is true that *Svagata* is more concerned with Western literature, but that might be explained circumstantially, for in the first place *Parichay* reviewed Western literature more frequently, and secondly, among its Western literature reviewers the editor was the foremost. However the few Bengali literature essays in the first edition and the few others he was going to write, would together propose a not too fragmentary view of Tagore and after. There could have been more, but unlike Buddhadeva Bose or Bishnu Dey Sudhindranath perhaps was not really concerned with a 'movement'; his concern with literary history was perhaps more personal. But we should not overstress this, for these essays on Eliots and Yeatses and Mauriacs and Brochs were not a mere assessment of Western literature as such, but a widening of the Bengali horizon as well, and absolutely consistent with the all too familiar Western impact on Bengali literature. They were Bengali essays, and Bengali essays meant for a Bengali readership.

Five

THE fourth decade of Sudhindranath's life ended in as much a disaster as this century's. He came to write less and less, *Parichay* seemed to be mattering not so urgently any more, besides the by now irreparable incompatibility with his wife led to an acute marital crisis. And it was about this time that he met his future second wife which complicated matters more, though she might not have been the immediate cause or the immediate outcome of that crisis. In addition to all this was the concern about the War: what was going to happen if it came? There were those of his friends who took a pro-German view, but there were also the committed anti-Fascists, and the *Parichay* evenings were bubbling with excitement. Sudhindra hated Hitler—his earlier tolerance he had revoked by now—but he did not approve of Stalin either; his anti-Fascist sympathies did not stop him from turning anti-Stalinist. Three events in particular gave him a jolt, events which proved to him that Stalin too was a threat to humanity; these were the Soviet-German treaty, the Soviet invasion of Finland and the assassination of Trotsky. The result was a break-up: the Marxists maintained their pro-Stalinist stand keeping aloof from the War until Hitler attacked Russia, Sudhindranath became more and more restless and when the War came courted enlistment.

Not that he had been a Marxist. But with his rationalist cast of mind he had regarded Marxism as a probable means to social justice and thought of Russia, if not as an ideal, as better than other societies in certain respects hoping for instance, that it would not make aggression. And when the anti-Fascist writers had their second national

conference in Calcutta in 1938, he not only acted as one of its presidents but provided hospitality to two or three of the delegates from outside. In his speech he claimed that Bengali literature had a perennial humanism and since Chandidas its principal protagonist had been the common man. This was not a passing enthusiasm (earlier he had been involved in collecting signatures, in 1936, to an anti-Fascist manifesto and in 1938 in raising funds in aid of China); between this and his decision a little later there was no contradiction. He understood the unique value of Soviet Russia, but did not understand why Soviet Russia should be the sole rationale of anti-Fascism. •

But there was no bitterness. When he moved out of *Parichay* he left it to his Marxist friends, he let the Anti-Fascist Writers' Association stage his Bengali version of Yeats's play *The Resurrection*, and above all he maintained a lifelong affection for at least a few of his Marxist friends. True he saw them less and less and made new friends, but they too saw him less and less and the reason was not purely ideological. Very few of the *Parichay* friends—and not just the Marxists—approved of his second marriage. Some, Susobhan Sarkar among them, felt that love was one thing and marriage another, that because the Hindu female was deprived of multiple marriages (this was pre-divorce, pre-Hindu Code Bill) the Hindu male should not indulge in such inequalities. Some simply wanted Sudhindra to reconcile with his first wife—Satyen Bose, Girijapati Bhattacharya and Jamini Roy, for instance; the last even thought of a steamer party to help bring about that reconciliation. And one or two, Dhurjatiprasad especially, first disapproved but later had a better understanding of Sudhindra's reasons.

But what were they? There was a sure incompatibility: she might not have been suited to his kind of personality and way of life—there was probably a lot he could not share with her; but was that all? Besides did she not try to change, or

did he not try to mould her ? Reportedly they did, reportedly they made quite a bit of effort. The house at 49C Hazra Road where they lived for some time away from the family home, did not help either ; and his father staying with them on some weekends must have seen the mounting tension. Was she jealous and could not cope with the enormity of his female acquaintance ? Was he prone to showing a bit of unusual warmth to his female friends ? Did it at any time look like an affair ? amount to a scandal ? But the traditional upper class Bengali Hindu wife was still somewhat used to a wayward husband, the initiative in the break-up might not have been hers. Or was it ? On the other hand how could such a decent man send his wife away permanently simply because there were scenes ? So there must have been something almost insurmountable. All we know is that at the time of the break-up or a little after Sudhindra entrusted his youngest brother with a sealed envelop and told him to open it and show its contents to his wife if there was ever any trouble. There never was an occasion to do it and two years after Chhabi Datta's death (1965), the envelop was destroyed. What were its contents ? Only Sudhindra knew and perhaps Chhabi did.

By the death-bed of his mother-in-law, the only time he went to his in-laws' after the break-up, Sudhindra promised that he would look after Chhabi's well-being, which he did. Ever since the break-up one-third of his income was sent to her and in his will he left her the same portion. He also bought her a house some time later in South Calcutta where she lived the rest of her life. Did he ever see her again ? There might have been a nostalgia as revealed in a word here or a word there, but probably no sense of guilt. Anyway at the time of the break-up he was absolutely certain of its need. When the things came to a breaking point at the Hazra Road house, he sent Chhabi to her parents' at 72 Cornwallis Street and himself went back to Hatibagan. But ostensibly he did that, at least in part, to mix morally more

freely with Rajeshwari Vasudev, a Punjabi student at Visva-bharati and owner of a fabulous voice. He had met her at his friend Sumantra Mahalanobis' and had felt very deeply about her. She was young and attractive, had the kind of exposure he would look for in a consort, and was still in a sense unsophisticated. True they were of two different generations but that did not matter, what mattered was their affinity of interests and taste. It was not only he who fell in love with her, but the gifted young singer who had Tagore's blessings and had already cut a disc or two, also fell in love with the middle-aged poet-intellectual, Tagore's successor and Tagore's adversary. The result was a rich experience, unlike those occasional attractions the debonair socializer might have had felt. But this coincided with the marital crisis and it looked as if he was leaving his wife for Rajeshwari. But was he? Was he not leaving Chhabi also for her own reasons or rather, for his and Chhabi's joint reasons? Was it really a love triangle, and not rather a failure of marriage coinciding with an intense love affair? Anyway it was a sensitive issue and if Sudhindra and Chhabi's well-wishers felt unhappy, one could not blame them. At the same time one could perhaps expect that his friends would, at least one or two would, understand him. The only person who seemed to have his confidence at the time was a distant relation, the famous gymnast Gobar Guha; he knew when Sudhindra was planning a second marriage.

It was not easy. He did not want to shock his old father. Besides, Rajeshwari's family did not approve of it. In fact they tried to dissuade her by making her come home and live with her elder sister for some time. When that failed and the other dissuasions too, they finally agreed on Sudhindra's word that he would sever all connections with his first wife. The marriage took place in Lahore, on 29 May 1943; none of Sudhindra's family attended—they did not know—except for Gobar Guha's son. Sudhindra re-

turned with his newly-married bride and put her up at Sushil Dey's flat on Theatre Road, and then told the family. First to his immediate younger brother who was the de facto head then ; Harindranath did not disapprove, on the contrary escorted Rejeshwari to Hatibagan and introduced her to her mother-in-law who also gave her a welcome. It was claimed by some members of the domestic staff that on that occasion Chhabi Datta came in a covered carriage to take a look at her from outside, which probably was a fabrication. Anyway, the acceptance by the family eased out the tension and helped Sudhindra finally to settle down. For some time he and Rajeshwari also stayed with his youngest sister, and then moved into a flat on Russell Street, house number 6, suite 6. A new life began.

Sudhindranath was forty-two and was working with the A.R.P. (Air Raids Precautions) as a communications officer—his immediate superior was Sushil Dey ; his age and poor health had stood in the way of active military service. The year before his father had died (16 September), and though that had been a tremendous loss to him and caused him great mourning, he had not been able to do the necessary rites the eldest son of a deceased Hindu was supposed to do (his youngest brother had done them instead). The reason might have been his A.R.P. job which required the khaki and an alert attendance. Whether or not he was also sceptical of such rites is a matter of guess, though from the general framework of his thought one would think so. Anyway he did have participated in one or two features of the mourning. Years later, on the occasion of his mother's death too he would not do his expected role and let Sourindranath do it again.

Sudhindranath had not been writing much. Three poems a year : that had been the rate in 1938, 39 and 40, and in 41 two ; then silence till 45 though he would do revisions of some Heine translations made earlier. There had been a similar fall in prose : three pieces each in 38, 39 and 40, in 41

one and then none for some five years. At the same time he had been losing interest in *Parichay*; it got to a point where he was ready to move out. Hiran Sanyal was at the time the joint editor, the last number under their joint signature came out in Ashad 1350 B.S. (June-July 1943), a few weeks after Sudhindranath's marriage to Rajeshwari. Probably there was some overture from Humayun Kabir to buy the magazine, but the more important overture came from his Marxist friends for whom Susobhan Sarkar did the talking. Sudhindra decided for them, but the magazine was not straightaway sold. He took a token monthly royalty (Rs 40) until 1948 when the Communist Party was banned and he wanted to close the deal. Besides there was an offer from Bimalchandra Sinha. The price quoted was Rs 5000 and the International Publishing House, run by some members of the Party, made the payment (minus the royalty paid so far).

Anyway in 1943, 44, 45 Sudhindranath was kept busy by his A.R.P. job. Besides he had a new home and new set of friends, of whom the most important perhaps, certainly the most illustrious, was M.N. Roy. He had met him earlier at Biren Roy's and invited him to *Parichay*. Roy had come a few times but hardly ever spoken. Afterwards at Sushil Dey's flat and at 6 Russell Street when Roy was in town (he had settled then at Dehradun), they had an ample chance of knowing one another intimately. Both loved to talk and argue, and there was no dearth of issues : a number of their friends and admirers bore witness to this intimacy. Here is the late Ellen Roy : "To communicate these in terms of bare facts does them no justice, because their significance lay not in anything particularly important or dramatic that happened, but in an atmosphere and in the spirit that prevailed and animated all those occasions. And how to describe the two talking till the small hours of a morning, on thermodynamics or artefacts or the sanctions of a secular ethics, in impassioned argument, jumping up

from their seats, physically restless with the dynamics of thinking, walking about talking, and suddenly laughing in the exhilaration of a new idea, an agreed formulation, a fresh insight." Not that Roy was trying to convert Sudhindranath to his brand of Marxism which he would soon christen "Radical Humanism", or that Sudhindranath was trying to dissuade Roy from a commitment. If we take a look at their correspondence, a part of which has been published, we can see how much they valued one another's views and still maintained a difference, Sudhindra asserting his scepticism and Roy his faith in progress. Sudhindra did not desert his Communist friends to become a Royist—if there is any such notion in circulation it is wrong—I would say it was his liberalism that attracted him to Manabendra-nath after his disillusion with the Communists on their pro-Stalinist stand. He had not been a Marxist, so he did not become an anti-Marxist as some of the European intellectuals did. As a matter of fact in a review of Arthur Koestler's *The Yogi and the Commissar*, written for Roy's magazine *The Marxian Way*, he sounded quite critical of such anti-Marxism or anti-Communism. What he could not afford was a commitment to either side ; he was a true liberal.

He tried to define his position in the very first article of the very first number of Roy's magazine, the magazine which he, incidentally, helped Roy plan and bring out. This is what he said : "... the liberal is a confirmed rationalist who, realizing that instinctive behaviour is impersonal, bases his individuality on the integral logic he has taught himself. He is, therefore, unafraid of opposition which he welcomes as a corrective to his possible dogmatism, and, since his need is development and not progress, he tends to become a solitary weighing pros and cons of questions wholly outside the scope of absolute answers." In essence this may not be far from the 'irony' of the Thomas Mann kind where the mind shuffles, as it were, in a dialectic

between two opposite attitudes. One may regret the lack of commitment, but one must respect the honesty.

"The Liberal Retrospect", that is, the first number of *The Marxian Way*, came out in 1945, July-September. And 1945 was also the year when the Anti-Fascist Writers' Association did a charity performance of his translation of Yeats's *The Resurrection (Punarujjiban)*, originally published in *Parichay* in Bhādra 1343 B.S. (August-September 1936). It was staged the Yeatsian way, at the Ashutosh College Hall and was a success. Bishnu Dey directed it, a thorough job. Jamini Roy painted the mask of Christ and the masked figure covered in a white sheet, also his idea, looked perfect. And Sudhindranath's Bengali went down very well even though some had feared that it might not. Anyway this performance was a proof that Sudhindranath had not really been 'discarded' by the Marxists; there was criticism, even severe criticism at times, but not antipathy or indifference.

Sudhindranath had been with the A.R.P. since 1942; in 45, at the end of the War, he joined *The Statesman* as an assistant editor. He had been connected with this British-owned English daily even earlier, as a matter of fact from the 30's, as an occasional book-reviewer. When the first volume of Tagore's Collected Works had been brought out by the Visvabharati in September 1939, he had been commissioned to do the review which had appeared in the Sunday issue of 15 October entitled "Tagore: The Unbeaten Pioneer". It was this piece that he had developed into a full-length review article in Bengali, "Rabindrāprati-bhar-Upakramanika" (Beginnings of the Genius of Tagore), for *Parichay*, Agraḥayan 1346 B.S. (November-December 1939), later included in his second book of essays. This was one, there must have been some others, but since the reviews were unsigned and since unfortunately *The Statesman* does not have any records so old, and since also I have not been able to trace any such drafts or offprints or clippings among Sudhindranath's papers, it is a matter of

pure guess (of course if we could collect adequate and dependable contemporary evidence and get corroboration from a thorough stylistic analysis of the probable pieces, we could have a better idea). Besides his connection as a reviewer, he had friends who worked there at various times, Malcolm Muggeridge and Lindsay Emerson among them. In any case, his appointment as an assistant editor was a rather unique event: surely the British management did not give much recognition to his excellence as a Bengali writer despite the favourable reviews he might have received in their newspaper; what was decisive was probably his English style and also probably, a bit ironically, the fact that he was one of the prime luminaries of Calcutta's Anglo-Bengali world at the time. As to what exact assignment he was given we have no definite knowledge, most probably he wrote the second editorial among other things. Did he at any time look after the book review section? We do not know, but we do know (from a letter of Rajeshwari Datta's to Ellen Roy) that sometime towards the end of his tenure—in 1948?—he looked after the letters to the editor. We also know that he had to work hard on them (from the letters, again, to the Roys), that when he came home he used to be so fatigued that he could not do any writing at all, even an article for Roy's magazine. We definitely know (from a letter to Buddhadeva Bose) that he felt journalism was harmful to literature. That eventually he did not like *The Statesman* job was clear: he almost accepted a job with *Thought*, a new magazine about to be launched in Delhi, as its literary and cultural editor, but something went wrong at the last minute. He was so depressed that he even thought of going over to England and reportedly made an application to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London for a lectureship in Bengali—we have this from Edward Shils who might have learnt it from Rajeshwari. Fortunately it did not materialize. "

During his tenure as an assistant editor he also published a few articles in the magazine section of *The Statesman*, one of which was "The Art of Atul Bose". He had written on Jamini Roy, and that he had refused to write on Tagore's paintings in 1941 (from a letter to Buddhadeva Bose), on the humane ground that Tagore was too old to be even mildly criticized, shows that his taste was rather discerning. He disapproved of the Oriental School in general—we have seen that above—for doing more illustration than painting. Atul Bose he liked for his honest application of technique. However it was Jamini Roy whom he considered the true master. Still in the fairly long piece he had written on him in 1939, "Jamini Roy and the Tradition of Painting in Bengal", an abbreviated version of which had been printed in the *Longman's Miscellany* 1943, he had ventured a criticism: "In spite of the ceaseless development he has shown right through a strenuous life, he has not yet succeeded in breaking down the aristocratic barrier that continues to separate him from the contemporary scene; and I suspect that his aloofness is not so much a matter of election as of an inherent tendency towards retrogression that expresses itself philosophically in a purblind Gandhism, nourished on revivalist dreams. ... After all, the turmoil of our cities is by now as firmly rooted in our soil as the stillness of our plains and the majesty of our hills; and, since Jamini Roy's one ambition in life has been to lose himself in the identity of his people, he must not turn away from them when they are on their predestined way. Of all men I can think of, he is the best fitted to become their representative and give shape to their aspirations; and I am sure that, could he but complete his work, he would not fail them. As it is, he is the most satisfying artist I have ever known: we both look back on the same past and are confronted by the same future."

It was in the mid-40's, especially after the War, that the Suite No. 6 at 6 Russell Street gradually turned into an

Anglo-Bengali Mecca of Calcutta. His life-style changed and at least outwardly he was alienated from the Calcutta of his youth. With his severance of connection with *Parichay* and with his dwindling productivity, he seemed to have moved away from the Bengali literary world. His contemporaries hardly saw him, his successors hardly knew him, besides his earlier friends hardly ever visited him. And with the new set he shared a lot of intellectual or ideological interest all right, but rarely the predominantly, let alone the purely, literary. He spoke English most of the time and although visited his mother regularly at Hatibagan, donned the dhoti on rare occasions. Not that he had not spoken English before, or worn Western clothes or eaten Western food, but his life-style had stayed Bengali. The shift from 139 Cornwallis Street to 6 Russell Street—we are ignoring the temporary 49C Hazra Road—was a shift also in outward culture. The layout of the suite—not exactly a reminiscence of 12 Wellington Square—the furniture, the draperies told one that it was an Anglo-Bengali home. One might be reminded of another Datta, some three quarters of a century his senior; but as Madhusudan was ultimately very Bengali at heart, so was he. He spoke English as clearly and distinctly as Bengali—very un-Englishlike; he wore an everyday suit with as much grace as a finely folded dhoti and kurta—quite un-Englishlike again. Looking at him one would not think of an inferior-minded W.O.G. but a proud Bengali who was dealing with Westerners as his peers, who, as it were, was flaunting Westernization at Westerners.

Outwardly he had a full life. But was there a crisis within because he had no children? In her recent memoirs Protiva Bose has quoted Rajeshwari speaking wistfully in the last year of her life (1976) of an unborn child. Did she about this time once conceive and not have the child? Did Sudhindranath's growing nihilism have anything to do with this? We can only speculate. What we know is that he

had a creative crisis and was writing less and less, and for some stretches of time, almost nothing.

Six

Sudhindranath left *The Statesman* in 1949. He did not take the job he was offered in Delhi's *Thought* for a last moment disagreement. The S.O.A.S. application also did not lead to anything. He had not written any poetry for quite some time except for a poem in English—the only one to my knowledge in his entire career—but that too about two years ago. "Independence Day" was dedicated to Eric de Costa, director of the Institute of Public Opinion, and was written six days after Independence. Far from being ecstatic and exuberant, it recorded the reality as such : "I do not know what independence means ; / And I have still to see the sword recast / As ploughshare." Besides the independence came right after the communal riots the memory of which was not easy to melt away. True there had been a sudden change from violence, but surely

Such signs are far too null to harbinger
That freedom we who once were young can call
A solace. But the rising sap is not
Our only loss : the years have hollowed out
The ancient world ; and while the heavens sag,
The earth is brittle underneath our feet.
So does it matter if events belie
Our expectations buried deep within
The mounting debris of successful wars
And consummated revolutions ?

This should not surprise us considering that Sudhindranath's view of history had never really been progressive. Yet there was one homage here, a homage worth the doing :

When, however, midnight strikes
Once more, and squalor is restored in place

Of splendour, memory will turn away
From incidentals of eternal flux,
And, seeking consolation, contemplate
An old man's legendary faith. He chose,
As liberty demands, to raise his voice
Above the roar of atom burst, and let
The spirit of man speak through him. ...
All else will crumble into dust; but, should
His name be uttered at the zero hour,
The dream of independence would survive
The ruin of aggressive opulence.

This was not a conversion to the Gandhian ideology, simply a recognition of the truth of some historic moment. One reads an ambivalence here rather than nihilism; his position was the liberal's in every possible sense.

In 1949 he left *The Statesman*, but in 1949 he joined the newly set up Damodar Valley Corporation as the chief publicity officer. One may see a hand of history here, but it may have been a simple coincidence. Besides the D.V.C. job was not conducive to his creativity any better than *The Statesman* one; the job that he had felt a little committed to, was the A.R.P. job, and the job that he would feel more committed to, would be the Jadavpur job in the last years of his life. But at the D.V.C., as at *The Statesman*, he worked quite conscientiously—so much so that when at the end of five years he saw a general change of policy, he resigned.

He resigned from the D.V.C. in 1954, but in the meantime in April-September 1952, he had his second trip abroad, this time accompanied by his wife, Rajeshwari. On his first trip he had taken the eastern route, on this he took the usual western route and visited the various countries of Europe including Italy and Greece, even Turkey. How did he feel after twenty-three years? Was it a mere coincidence that he avoided Germany? On his next trip

too, in 1955-56, he would do that. In any case the 1952 trip must have done him some good, for when he came back he had a spell of creativity. The last Bengali poem he had written was in 1945, and the last piece of prose in 46. We have seen above his sole creativity of 47, and in 48 he did revision of just one translation. In 49, 50, 51 nothing, in 52 more revisions, in fact quite a few by his standards, but they were revisions, not original writing. Suddenly in 53 he wrote three poems—one of them one of his very best—did more revisions and new translations. In 53 he brought out his fifth book of poems, *Samvarta*, in some ways his best, running into a second edition in two years. In 54 he would do a second edition of *Orchestra*, in 54-55 collect his translations into a book, in 54-56 write ten more poems which he would put together temporarily as his last book of poems, in 56-57 revise and reissue *Svagata* and publish a second book of essays. Surely this was a spell of creativity after long barren years.

Samvarta was dedicated to Abu Sayeed Ayyub and contained twenty-three poems, of which seven were rewritten juvenilia. This was his first book to be published by Dilipkumar Gupta of the Signet Press who would do his remaining books. His publisher so far had been Kundabhushan Bhaduri of the Bharati Bhavan except for the very first one, *Tanvi*, which had been published by Sudhirschandra Sarkar of M.C. Sarkar & Sons. The *Samvarta* poems proper were spread over a period of 16 years: 27 July 1938 to 23 May 1953 within a few days of which, on 31 May, he wrote a foreword to the book, a remarkable piece, not simply as yet another example of his terse prose style, but for his commitment to Mallarméan poetic. Here is a translation of some relevant parts:

Great poets are supposed foster children of eternal time and the vast earth; and by their side I am not merely a dwarf stretching out his hand, but if they are creators of the right relish then I do not

even deserve the title connoisseur. At least in my writings the mark of the modern age is distinct, and since the philosophy I have arrived at today by means of personal experience and utmost practice is a recent version of the ancient *Kshanavad* (the view that only instants are true), there is no denying that all my works are absolutely evanescent. But impermanent and indifferent are not different forms of the same adjective ; and as I believe in the deed by being like the Buddhists a nihilist, so do I consider the self-contained doer to be the very basis of the entire universe.

When the said belief is applied to literature, the irresponsibility called inspiration is bound to lose its authority ; and yet in the selection of poetic subject-matter the poet no doubt has little self-determination, still since the expression of contexts contained by the instincts and environment calls for an absolute resolve or a ceaseless effort, there is no need of a reader at the birth of a particular poem, its finished form is what is meant for public consideration. Of course even the greatest achievement of man is incomplete ; and a work of art which is in every part incomparable or whose improvement is not conceivable, is rare. ...

Yet in my aesthetics the container is superior to the contained ; and as a being I am no doubt subject to the outside world, still the lack of uncommon emotions in this book is lamentable. Even the evolution of a particular style is not recorded here ; and though for twenty years I have consciously wanted an agreement of prose and verse, my desire and my ability are still now at times at loggerheads. ...

In any case it is the poetic propounded by Mallarmé that is my goal : I too agree that the primary ingredient of poetry is the word ; and the present compositions are to be considered as experiments alone in the use of words. In some poems there may also be an attempt to see whether words, both light and heavy, indigenous and borrowed, even jargon, can be used without making an allowance for a looseness in the metrics ; and since both words and metre are parasites, the prelude to the present arrangements of words and uses of

metre is the author's thought and feeling, the external basis of which again is the contemporary course of events.

The prime theme of *Samvarta* was the War, or rather the causality that led to the War, introduced by the very first poem "Nandimukh" (Commencement), also the earliest written. "To write a song for you" is how it starts off, and we may expect a love poem, but soon it picks up a lot of social concern.

Yet it rains unceasing in my heart :
A wet, grey and unbodied city,
As wicked as a ghost ...
The rapt meditation is snapped as it swoops.
What shadows are those on the screen ?
What names ? No answer, only
The rain beats down. ...

At times I feel I know them.
Such forms and lines, lightning-flashed,
Are caught in Chinese canvasses.
In Spain too such gestures
Are perhaps a part of the painted discords ;
Disrupting their quiet luxuries there too
An alien army breaks in pleasure gardens today.
From Spain to China in twilight lost ...

They also did love like me
Boundless plains and sovereign skies,
And stars swept by winds.
Fed up with living in hordes,
They looked for emotional ties ;
Thought the silver moon was within reach
Hung from the wish-tree's stooping branch.
In the city only venom drank
They too like me.

But spreading gossamer in void,
 Throws mockery around the honey-bees
 The ever wakeful Time. ...
 The blind flies buzz ; in all world hangs
 Time's gossamer. ...

His freedom we must first renew ;
 Else cities and plains
 Will keep covered in stale corpses. ...
 In our own strength we must join
 The turbulence of purification.

The last note is a bit affirmative, reminiscent of "Utpakhi" written not much long ago, though in no way typical of *Samvarta*. The third poem "Ujjiban" (Awakening), another early poem, is about God, the promised Incarnation, in the same vein as those of *Krandasi*. These are its concluding lines :

Whose priests ?
 Steps—whose footsteps
 Echo in silence ? Arrival—
 Whose arrival suddenly brings
 A noisy interruption to the promised oracle ?
 It is to be the other then ?
 That brute force by yielding to which you became
 deathless,
 Is it his awakening this time ?
 The Egyptian corpse
 That was hidden away in an underground grave,
 Comes, not you, he, half-beast, half-man
 With an ever-widening desert ?
 The eternal Soul is dead : a dread drums in heart.

He could have called it a 'second coming' like Yeats 'punarujjiban' of a sort, instead he ironically called it

"ujjiban", 'awakening'—a nihilistic view of the coming War. Is it Hitler he was thinking of as the Anti-Christ?

One of the more personal poems of *Samvarta*, written not long before the War (3 February 1939), is "Jason" where he used the myth to make some relevant meaning. Its pace is slow, a bit tortuous, fittingly ironical for the subject, the sterility of the intellectual 'hero'.

At great pains I have learned to swim ;
 At least drifting down the stream is no problem now.
 The river too has many bends ;
 And being thrown on some of them, survive
 Even such as do not know the A.B.C. of swimming.
 Them the sea does not draw.
 In reeds or sedges
 Or in the green gossamer of mermaids' hair
 They are not tangled like blind flies.

Rather whirlpools
 Fling them on safe shores.
 In a fierce duel
 Killing the wakeful demon, it is they who collect
 Half the kingdom and princess ; an arousing climate
 Makes them propagate the line ; and lying here finally
 In rapture they hear the welcome from heaven.

Yet I cannot plunge in water from my drowning boat.
 In vain skill
 Hold on to the broken helm ; fix the torn sail with
care ;

Pore over the map's shreds.
 Forget I am alone ; the companions
 Have stayed back in luring ports or in fatigue,
 Even their track is lost. ...

And so am I helpless today, with no child, a destitute ;
Again and again
The Almighty screws up the difference between
 desire and ability.

Water fills up
The boat full of holes; but I imagine I am riding
The boundless deep at pleasure; in fact in flow-tide
Come back as much as advance in the ebb. ...

In what faith do I then
Hold on to the broken helm, fix the torn sail with care,
Pore over the map's shreds,
Think
On these few worn-out planks the absurd claim
of the ego
Be again answered beyond the seven seas ? ...

That ancient thirst
Which the sea could not quench, will perhaps be rid
In the river where the flow and ebb mingle, where
The great void is mirrored, the father of the sea and
its symbol,
Unsurpassable, self-contained, progressive.

Nihilism ? Not far from it. Not far from what Sudhindra-nath was going to say in 1941, in a sonnet included in this book : "Perhaps no God exists : Creation, born a waif, / Remains unruly still."¹

But perhaps all his doubts and despair were here most successfully expressed in the title poem of the book, in some ways Sudhindranath's greatest poem. 166 lines long, comparable in scope as also in size to its predecessor "Orchestra" and successor "Jajati", this was written on 6 September 1940, almost on the occasion, as it were, of the first anniversary of the World War II to which the title—

1. Sudhindranath's own translation.

Sudhindranath's own English was "Cyclone"—referred. A dramatic monologue, it may remind us of Mallarmé's "L'Après-midi d'un faune", of which he would later make a translation. The lines are of uneven length but rhymed, the kind of *payar* Tagore had introduced in his later poetry ; and considering the structure in six sections we might say that a Debussy could have written a score for this poem too—the way its theme keeps growing is indeed remarkable. But what perhaps is most interesting about it is its fusion of a private and a public theme—it is a fine love poem and at the same time a keen commentary on history. Sudhindranath perhaps made the most detailed reference to actual historical events—no one else of his generation wrote so intensely about the War, the most important global event of his lifetime. But all this alongside a personal experience which is what gave life to history.

"On days of rain I still remember her"—but the poem is not a straight reminiscence, the past is put in perspective. A middle-aged man who has grown a paunch and a dewlap and whose hairline has receded to expose a crown, is doing the reminiscing. The times are difficult and he cannot pay his monthly insurance premium without depleting his daily menus, besides the devaluation has made it absurd to invest the mites he occasionally puts by. The times are difficult because (a) "beyond / The veiled horizons gleaners fight among / The stubbles", (b) "the fallow fields are sown / with atavistic hate which death shall reap / For centuries to come", (c) "on thrones / Of banished or beheaded Caesars climb / Contending tyrants, each more absolute / Than he who went before" ; the times are difficult because there is a War on. And the War finally means

The Lonely Watcher of the Skies sustains
No longer nor protects ; and pushing out
The golden stopper, chthonic darkness drowns
The procreative cities of the ant.

A noose of bombers holds the heavens fast
And chokes the Primal Poet, in whose throat
Afflatus rattles like a moribund's
Expiring breath.

"But when her sacred presence comes to fill / The haunted
void",

on me descends a peace
That passeth understanding. This abode
Of fat and lymph and bitterness, my brute
And loathsome body, then, abruptly purged
Of time's excrescences and spatial faults,
Reverts to elemental purity.
And insulated in my changeless dreams,
An active hero of high tragedy,
I found Utopia where order reigns
Without the aid of soldiers, planes and guns.

Simply a wish-fulfilment, or sanctioned by history? The times that the middle-aged speaker is here evoking, did really look up and it really seemed that there was not going to be any unrest in Central Europe for a while and that Germany was going to recover from the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty—at least that was the overt intent of Stresemann and Briand's Locarno Pact. That was in 1929. But "by then already cataclysmal clouds/ Had massed perhaps, and, ambushed in their midst, / The Thunder God was sharpening his sword." There were at least two signs, the rise of Mussolini and Trotsky's exile from the land of socialism. However what mattered to the speaker in 1929 was

the heritage
Of countless sunsets in her glowing hair ;
The lunar bloom of ripened grapes upon
Her lissom limbs ; and limber lightning of
Disdain revealing suddenly her eyes'
Cerulean profundity ; the works

Of Goethe, Hoelderlin and Rilke, with
 The tales of Thomas Mann, reposing in
 The alcoves ; Bach's sonatas nestling on
 The clavichord ; the lustrous ceiling of
 Centennial oak sweeping up to meet
 The gables

And all this, "beside / The carefree bed of Culture lost in dreams. Naturally "against such nights the Nazis, looked at from / My attic, could not but seem pigmy drolls, / However much they heiled in unison / And, waving smoky torches, trooped behind / The Swastika."

Here Sudhindranath spells out what he has been hinting. There is a kind of law by which if that lull in history is true, then Hitler too is true—we cannot have the one without the other. "For truth / And falsehood, good and evil, ugliness / And beauty are reciprocally linked, / Because if either fades, its obverse, too, / Must disappear and, while they both exist, / The minus may become the plus, like poles / In alternating fields." This had been shaping as one of his prime perceptions. He believed in the dialectic, but unlike the Marxists did not believe in progress. In another poem a few years later, a poem in fact on the victory of the Allied Forces, he would repeat this in unequivocal terms (and we have spoken above of the English poem of a similar intent). There is no progress, only "personal determination can, / When brought to bear upon the pendulum / Of change, accelerate or slow it down." At this point the poem adds another inevitable detail about the middle-aged speaker : if his past love was true, then his present hankering for sex too is true.

But these "fragmental recollections" could simply be an attempt to stay unreminded of "sure senescence". The reason is

history abounds in periods
 Of hibernation, when the earth, a lost

Somnambulist, is separated from
The brotherhood of transcendental stars ...

The characteristics of such periods are (a) imprisonment of man "in the dark night of / The soul", (b) the past as "the poisoned cud", (c) the future "blighted", (d) "unransomed death", (e) no "certitude of faith", (f) "blind belief". And the "desolation" in such periods of hibernation is finally symbolized in that

He breathes his proper exhalations which
No atmosphere absorbs or animates ;
And, though the level heat of entropy—
Incapable of further progress—burns
Him, his impurities are not consumed,
Nor does it warm the introspecting self
Infected with the ague of a world
Extinct.

This 'history' turns out to be : "Old Lenin's mummy wrapt in mysteries / Of Muscovy ; undaunted Trotsky felled / By hammer-blows ; triumphant Stalin turned / To Hitler's friend ; the corpse of Spain ; Cathay / Approaching dissolution ; headless France / Exhibiting reflexive agony." This is the public experience. And the private ? "I have no means of finding out / If she is still alive or bombed to dust." With this the poem comes, as it were, full circle, for given the historical experience, "On days of rain I still remember her" would eventually end in this.

Such nihilism is rare in Bengali poetry. That this was not an accident, is proved by Sudhindranath's subsequent writing. As mentioned above, "1945" is one example. A paean for victory it could have been, judging by his initial commitment to the War, but it is not.

Predicting victory, you said that, diabolical though
The Nazis were, they too must vanish once their day
was done ;

And, true enough, defeated Germany is in the throe
Of total death, while West, it seems, awaits the morning
sun.

At least the Russian legions, like a retributive flood,
Engulf exploited lands to aggravate their brittleness ;
And Paris, freed, when not redeeming shame with
traitors' blood.

Parades before the tattered world dress after perfect
dress.

Become at last an equal partner both in war and peace,
America is lavish now with money as with men ;
And even England, which monopolized the Golden
Fleece,

Prepares to found the welfare state and start from
scratch again. ...

For all that, when you spoke of victory, you did not
want
The present state of things which cancels profit out by
loss,

Reducing them to utter nullity ; and what we flaunt
As peace is but exhaustion of the will, our special cross.
Was it for this that we endured two global wars,
rejoiced

In countless insurrections, piled up millions of dead
To rot in shallow graves ? And has the time now come
to hoist

Triumphal flags along the cheering streets dictators
tread ?

The heavens are extinct ; and darkness has regained its
sway.

You too are lost for ever in the emptiness of space.
Who then will answer if the desolation of today
Is cumulative punishment for Adam's fall from grace ?¹

This may show Sudhindranath's respectful disagreement with M.N. Roy for whom this poem was reportedly written.

The next poem in *Samvarta* is "Jajati", written a few years later and a most remarkable piece especially for its technique. One of the things Sudhindranath had been trying to do in verse, was to bring it as close as possible to prose, and I think "Jajati" bears the full measure of the success. The poem has 108 lines, laid out in five more or equal sections of which the first is outwardly unrhymed but has hidden rhymes inside, the second and fourth are rhymed but the third absolutely unrhymed, and the fifth rhymed in alternate lines. Both terse and supple, this comes close to Mallarmé's ideal of writing poetry with words alone—in fact it may remind us of Sudhindranath's translation of "L'Après-midi" to be done in a few months—though he had not yet quite acquired his master's evocativeness. However in detail the poem is rather Rimbaudesque and Tagorean—as Buddhadeva Bose reminded us in a review, a skilful combination of "Le Bateau ivre" and "Niruddesh Jatra" (An Aimless Voyage). One may see here a complex kind of Western impact, for Tagore's own metaphor had been the fruit of an earlier impact on the Bengali letters, fully assimilated and made part of the tradition by the time Sudhindranath appeared on the scene. Anyway, the blending of the rather diffuse image of an aimless voyage in a golden boat with a smiling woman at the helm, an alien (any memory of Sudhindranath's own experience in 1929?), and the concrete image of a terrifying and marvellous sea-voyage, is not only symbolic literary history but first-rate poetry besides being honest autobiography. "Samvarta" was written by a poet who was almost forty, "Jajati"'s author had turned fifty not long ago; the two represent the two turns in two different ways: in one we have an interplay of sustaining memory and drab drudgery, in the other reflections replete with irony.

Past fifty : forest exile, to wise men of the East,
 Is now indispensable ; and although by science
 The West has stretched the average life-span
 Of late, yet there the fear of death dominates
 Youth, and robs old age of its soul. The promised
messiah
 Is elsewhere too unrarried ...

This is the opening of "Jajati", and the first section piles further details on the dual theme of ageing and fear, alienation and futility. "That means / Death is manifest in all things today". But there is no point in lament, at least the author should not do any remorse for he knew that "such disaster / Was not only probable but inevitable". This theme is developed in the second section and along with it, in contrast, a hint of legendary success. The image of a voyage is picked up here and drawn out in full and into the third section. "A raft / I too once launched like them, today / That alone is my sole credential." After a description of that adventure ("And instantly had ceased / Worries and controversies of tradesmen competing / For bales of English cotton and loads of American / Wheat"¹) :

now

With very nature's approbation my dream
 Consists of a town secured by ancient walls
 Where at deep, cool evening the weary child
 Is mirrored in a black pond with his fragile boat.

There is more autobiography in the fourth section :

But since no universal nostrum can appease
 The hunger for hallucination, Rimbaud himself had
failed,
 Even in the last century, to find that quiet spot,
 Although, as if in vicarious expiation of
 Colonizers' crimes, he had fled to the African coast

1. This and the next two excerpts are in Buddhadevy Bose's translation.

narrow maze of the Infinite, / In dreams and waking may I remember that the wish-tree / Is not root up and branch down, that it is rarely seen / Around which runs on all sides the sea—or the desert ?”

There are two other poems written in 1953, “Unmarga” (Manqué) and “Pratyavartan” (Return), the first an extension of “Jajati” in a way and the second of both that and “1945”. “Jajati” is perhaps the most seminal of the later poems—even the very last poems may be in part traced to it. One of the images recurring there is that of a boat and a boatman. One external reason why this image has such consistency in 1953-56, may have been the two trips to Europe in 1952 and 55-56 on both of which he travelled by sea (in fact one or two of the last poems were written on board an ocean liner).

The appendix to *Samvarta*, the rewritten juvenilia, is interesting not simply as an evidence of what sort of poetry he had written at the beginning but also as a display of what he himself called “the aesthetic conscience”—in other words, of transformation it underwent without losing its original scope. A look at any of the manuscripts would show what pains he took to make it readable. He is remarkable for the extent to which this conscience ran ; perhaps he would almost agree with Valéry that a poem is never finished and that a so-called finished poem is the publisher's creation—in one case he even beat himself, the revision was nearly word for word, interlinear. Anyway the earliest of these juvenile poems had been originally written in early 1924—that is, within a year of his first recorded composition. Though some of them are prior to the *Tanvi* poems, they reflect in general the same tone and deal mostly with the same themes. The last of these, “Path” (Way), originally much longer, is unusually substantial and sustained, also a bit seminal.

Samvarta was honoured as the best poetry of the year by the “All Bengal Rabindra Literary Conference”. A junior

poet called it "epical". And it was from about this time that the junior poets began to build their contact with him—some even organized his readings at his own flat. The contact that had started earlier by way of ideology, especially political (Royism), now took a literary turn. In 1954 he published the second edition of *Orchestra*; a few months later he put together his verse translations, done and revised at various times, into a book, *Pratidhvani*. The very title, 'Echoes', seems to hint his theory of translation. Two of his contemporaries also did extensive translations, Buddhadeva Bose and Bishnu Dey, and if one preferred imitation the other preferred transformation. Sudhindranath elaborated his position in the preface :

Since to me poetry is the union of speech and perception, I must also admit that its translation is impossible; and though the grammatical ease of English, the fascination for qualitative words in French, or German's syntax, or its profusion of compounds, is not quite unavailable in Bengali, yet between these three and the Bengali language there exists a difference of heaven and hell. At least those who have the experience know, that as some of the affirmations of the West are understood by us through negation, we also use many words everyday which are hyperboles par excellence in the West; and so, like a certain translator of *Macbeth*, I cannot claim that the following verses are not only the literal renderings of various foreign poems, but even exact rhythmic imitations. Such an effort is really absurd; and although to arrive at the truth that the sole task of the poet is to achieve an inseparable equation of idea and language, has taken me half my lifetime, I realized at the very first stage of my untried self-confidence that since Bengali translations are to be read by the Bengalis, in considering them the rules and regulations by the Bengali standards are indispensable. That is, whether the rhythm of the Bengali translation is the English iambic pentametre, is not the immediate concern; if it does not please our ears then its variety is quite pointless; and in translation of imagery too the carbon-copyist clerk only provides an inferior relish, does not receive

the audience's applause by arousing the intended emotion.

On the other hand Bengali is a living language ; and for that reason, though born in the village, by borrowing unhesitatingly from not only Sanskrit but Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Urdu, Portuguese, French, English and others, it is also in some measure established in the city today. So to train it in the new modes of thought is relatively easy ; and translation is one means of increasing its evocative qualities. ... many would perhaps agree that to write a life of Jesus the literal style of the Bengali Bible is as unnecessary now as the use of Janmashtami¹ for Christmas ; and then a general rule may be acceptable that only where the intention does not change with a change in the image, familiar or universal symbols are worth using, not elsewhere. ...

That is, the dissociation of emotion and expression in this case too is an evidence of lost labour ; and the place that sense objects have in one's own poetry belongs in translations for the time being to the original. Of course the causal connection between the outer and the inner world is the discovery of the vulgar intellect ; and should we once lose faith in the logic of coincidence, the most that can be admitted is that the two worlds are parallel. But if a little thinking is done, even a confirmed materialist will no doubt agree that literary creation is selective ; and in poetry the uncultivated experience too is probably inadmissible ; words charged with relish² are perhaps the culmination of that commotion in the mind when the perceptions from time and place sink into the subconscious. In translation's case the indirect reaction of sensitivity takes the place of primary emotion ; and the only difference between what happens afterwards and the original composition of a poem, is that there is little room here for disagreement about the elements. Yet such good writing is rare whose intention does not change from age to age, or where the particular reader's range of perceptivity does not have a free play ; and for that reason, as it is normal that a poem can have

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1. In the Hindu calendar the birth of Krishna is celebrated on this day.
 2. This is one of the definitions of poetry in the Sanskrit rhetoric.

more than one translation, so it does not always look the same to the same translator.

This then was Sudhindranath's aesthetic of translation. As to its function in the career of a poet :

... when I began translations from foreign poetry, I did not have the faintest trace of an aesthetic in my mind, I got my impetus to work from an immediate approbation ; and though I did not feel the need of revision until that basic innocence had run out, repairs went on in redressing such errors and lapses, not dependent on any aesthetic, as looseness in metrics, misuse of words, unsmoothness of sentences, inconsistencies in images. ... For this labour is not really a waste; and whatever room there may be in translation for individuality, since its measured limits are detrimental to license, its practice is another name for self-discipline. At least not even half of the opportunity that translation has given me for experimentation, has been available in my own writing ; and so the enthusiasm that began in mere approbation, has ended in the mighty lure of the difficult.

Pratidhvani was dedicated to Indira and Sushilkumar Dey, and has three sections : English, German and French. In the English section are translations of 23 Shakespeare sonnets, 1 D.H. Lawrence poem, 2 John Masefield poems, a poem by C. Field which is a version of a poem by Jalaluddin Rumi, and 1 Hugh Menai and 1 Siegfried Sassoon poem. The German section is 16 Heine translations, 2 Goethe and 1 Hans Karossa. The French is 6 Mallarme translations and 1 Valery. Whether or not Shakespeare, Heine and Mallarme-Valery are the most characteristic English, German and French, may be debatable, but they surely are poets of various tastes and for a translator to reproduce all these tastes fairly authentically, is quite something. However if Buddhadeva Bose's most significant translation is that of Baudelaire and Bishnu Dey's that of Eliot, then Sudhindranath's is that of Mallarmé-Valery. Of course his Shakespeare translations are no less successful—

such rendering of metaphor is indeed rare—or his versions of Heine where the tone has been so convincingly transplanted ; but what matters here is the suppleness he had discovered in his language to fit the Mallarmean *vyanjana* and the rare combination of music and argument that is characteristic of Valéry. “Ebauche d'un serpent” is not often translated into English, for reasons which are quite understandable, for English does not normally sound comfortable in such a short measure and is unfortunately rather poor in rhymes. Not that Bengali thrives in such decasyllabics, but there is one advantage over English—Bengali has no problem with rhymes. Still to maintain the fairly intricate rhyme-scheme for 31 ten-line stanzas along with writing absolutely unfaltering decasyllabics for so long, is a rare achievement. If we make an anthology of the very best translations in Bengali, then “Adinag” will be one of them. And so will “Fauner Divasvapna”—“L'Après-midi d'un faune”. In many ways this is the best poem of Mallarmé's, and undoubtedly this is the most important translation of Sudhindranath's. The Alexandrine has been aptly represented by the 18-syllabic measure ; the lines run on from one to another so smoothly that the aa bb cc rhymes, faultlessly maintained, never produce any monotony. The tonal variations, the sudden falls and the sudden rises or a steady bass, are reproduced without fail—the musical potential which Debussy made use of in his composition of the same name, is fully preserved ; besides the images are as clear and precise as in the French, and the *recit* as relaxed. It is better than any English version I have read. Sudhindranath has also a note on the poem, one of the most illuminating where he traces Mallarmé to something rather close to Samkarācārya : “Of course in monism Mallarmé's master was not Samkara, but Hegel. But as a great many people think that Samkara was a nihilist in disguise, so are pure Being and unruffled Nothing similar in Hegel's view ; and thus to his disciple Mallaṛmé

too, the golden container of the Ultimate One is full of illusions."

Perhaps the reason why his Mallarme-Valery translations are Sudhindranath's best, at least most significant, is his aesthetic affinity with them. However, though there was not much affinity with Heine, his Heine pieces have a lot of wit and are unusually crisp—surely he is the best Bengali translator so far of Heine. Whether or not he is also the best Bengali translator of Shakespeare's sonnets, may be debated, but what may not be doubted is the Shakespearean tone which has been so faithfully reproduced. What may not be doubted is the high standard Sudhindranath had set for himself and the meticulous care he had taken to maintain that. What may not be doubted is that Sudhindranath is one of our very best translators.

Seven

Samvarta came out in 1953, *Orchestra* 2nd edition in 1954, *Pratidhvani* in 1955, *Samvarta* 2nd edition in 1955, and in 1956 his last book of poems, *Dashami* (Ten Poems). In the meantime his ties with the Bengali literary world had been largely re-established, thanks to his junior admirers and his contemporaries Buddhadeva Bose and Bishnu Dey. Buddhadeva Bose had also become an intimate literary friend by now and so deep was his appreciation of Sudhindranath that when he founded the first Comparative Literature Department of India at Jadavpur University, Calcutta, he invited him to join as a part-time teacher which was quite unique, for Sudhindranath did not have an M.A. degree, the minimum requisite for college teaching in India. But before this assignment, in 1954-56 he was the director of the Calcutta branch of the Institute of Public Opinion and in 1955-56 went on his third trip abroad, this time too with his wife Rajeshwari, visiting French North Africa, Great Britain, Holland, France, Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece and Egypt. Like his second trip some three years ago this too must have done him a lot of good, for among other things, as reminded above, he wrote two poems on the way back. That was in early 56, and he had already written two poems in 54 and one in 55, and was going to write five others in February-March 56. It is these poems that he issued as a paperback with the notice: "These poems will be included in Sudhindranath's next book. Hence *Dashami* will not be reprinted."

Dashami was dedicated to Abanibhushan Chatterjee. The poems are short and evocative, at least a few of them—was he on his way to realizing his Mallarmean ideal in full

making conscious arrangements of words which would hint meaning rather than state? The first poem, "Pratiksha" (Awaiting), which is pretty straight and in structure a bit reminiscent of the earlier poetry, in a way announces the general theme. (Incidentally, the very first word "pāti", in the sense of 'falling', standing by itself and not in conjunction with such words as 'sadyah' or 'antah', is a unique usage in Bengali.)

Whose footfalls on falling leaves ?
He¹, I know, will never return :
Then why these lifted palms in *palash*^a ?
Out of wood an endless stretch of
eroded earth ;
Not a hint of harvest in heaven ;
What was to be said has been long said.

Filled with the great void's silences,
Aloneness is now unvalled ;
Past and future in present lost ;
Negation's logic in Nothing self-evident,
The Self-Absolutist's dread self-reflection,
The last resort of the desperate, resolve, a
fruitless bridle. ...

No use then waiting for any :
Isn't sure ruin good in one's own truth ?
In an alien world man is ever alone.
In surmise begun, to end in doubt,
Life is sick of beliefs :
Shall I not still realize myself ?

Apart from its untranslatable alliterations which however is a general feature of Sudhindranath's poetry, this poem has

1. In the original *Phalguni*, who could be Arjuna, or even Christ who died in spring.

2. A bright red flower that blooms in spring.

an unusual rhyme-scheme : aabccb, and one or two of the rhymes are absolutely new. The second poem, "Naukadubi" (The Wreck), develops this theme in an image.

Autumn's¹ splendour in an immense plain :
 On horizon a flock of white sheep
 Graze confidently ; a shepherd seldom limps
 In a pleasant wood.

Ending in empty barns, beginning in a closing
mart,
 Who is this on foot, alone ?
 A dream of gold in two eyes ; the ware's flaws
and dues
 Suddenly made light.

But the day flits by : fast fades
 The field's green in void ;
 Bursting in a bouyant atmosphere the hidden
flow of dark
 Drowns the earth.

The wanderer made a boatman then ; the only
asset
 A sinking little boat :
 His whole world thus surging in a flood,
 All good thrown up.

Of course the final suspension of breath is
irremediable ;
 Unsurpassable are Nothing's bounds ;
 In conspired wrecks the auspicious polestar
and submerged magnet
 Are indifferential.

1. Autumn is not quite Sarat which is the season after the rains.

Yet only when the boatman drops in the abyss,
 In a flash of memory
 He will realize himself, then mingling in the
elements
 Become nature.

This does not seem very far from Existentialism where the search for self in the face of sure ruin is perhaps the main human essence. But by stressing, repeatedly stressing, the ruin and the absolute anarchy of values, Sudhindranath comes close to what he himself called "nihilism". One of the words that recur in the late poetry is "nasti" ('Nothing', the French 'néant'). There is also the hint of a "trata", a messiah, an incarnation of Krishna—as Buddhadeva Bose reminded us in an explication of the above poem, a "shepherd limping" in a wood—but he is never going to come, the world is going to stay "orphan", the only progress is going to be that of the ghouls. All signs of an 'annunciation' turn out to be a delusion :

Sudden whispers in the silence ;
 Some beginning somewhere.
 Is the oracle again fulfilled,
 No loss of way this time ? ...

Yet a mirage would seduce us today :
 We exchange wisdom for delusion ;
 Mop the ineffable with ink-stains ;
 The Egyptian seed eats up an oasis.
 The unrealizable potential's perversion in
the absurd ;
 Why are the crippled wings in flutter then ?
("Asangati" : Disharmony)

This is from the ninth poem. But in the seventh, "Upasthapan" (Introduction), he put down his thoughts clearly—its style reminiscent of "Jajati"'s with hidden rhymes.

And why in separation, in union as well, in
 alternate costume,
 Learn the role of proud self-confidence the
 dangling one's
 Progeny : the earth is engaged in self-revolution
 Underneath the unpropped feet, heaven is
 hanging above,
 At the back the prophetic Nothing forces a
 preface, in front
 Floats up glory in the crystal magic glass—in a row
 They all light evening lamps in the Great Exit, so
 that
 The sojourner may not lose his returning way in
 Sahara.
 A whirling splintering car is the present, the
 world filled with anarchy.

The perception of reality as 'instant' is no doubt a development of his earlier view that truth and falsehood, good and evil are 'reciprocal'—that is, the view that if the one grows the other also grows, that there is no respite from this historical process. What one saw in "Samvarta" is a kind of irony, but this is past irony. Not only is everything impermanent, even impressions do not add up, for past and future are mere metaphors—the only existence is that of the 'instant'. It is wrong to think that Time is going from one point to another : Sudhindranath had never believed in progress, in fact this was where, in spite of (or was it because of ?) his purely rational approach to reality, he disagreed with both his Marxist friends and, later, M.N. Roy—but in his earlier poetry he did link past and present, though to show that past was no worse than present or present no better than past : in any case he did see a certain causality. But in his last poems he renounces that altogether. So, if there is no progress, no causality even, what are we left with ?

Nihil.

Both his "instant" and "nihil" have a Buddhist tinge, and Sudhindranath himself has reminded us of it. This is not the place to dig the source ; it could have been his father who had written on Buddhism, it could also have been independent study (one of his *Parichay* friends, Prabodh Bagchi, was well versed in Buddhism). But what matters more is how he arrived there, through what experience and intellection in other words. We might have an indirect answer in one of his last pieces of prose, the preface to his second book of essays :

A great mathematician once told me that, if I had adequate training I might have been able to show some excellence in mathematics. and even a falsely modest man like me is bound to agree that this comment was no indication of divination, was evidence of friendly loyalty. But ever since my boyhood I have been devoted to reason ; and as in spite of that Locke has convinced me that since God's love for man is boundless, he would not have sought Aristotle's help to teach him reasoning, so also do I disapprove of the decree that the poet and the logician by their very nature do not partake of the same table. ...

Unfortunately I am not a poet or a sage, am a follower in the footsteps of dilettantes ; and for that reason a trace of organization is still rare in my writing. Besides in more than one prudent person's consideration I am supposed to be a renegade ; and however absurd may this allegation be, it is difficult for me to deny that being unable to reconcile with place and time I have long taken refuge in the self's absolutism. But though there is no need at the moment for a controversy in that, my self-realization is non-monistic ; and since due to that even external perception presupposes an overwhelming reaction from the self, consistency is not simply the unique antidote to the mental disease called schizophrenia, but the sole technique of living as well. That is, in the self-perceived cosmos we are not merely the means, we are the progenitors of the horrible, patrons of falsehood and evil-doers ; and once that is accepted death attains

as much value as life, as also the reciprocity of the non-self. For similar reasons the progress of Western philosophy too is faced with a dilemma today ; and to reduce the age of recent Existentialism by putting Descartes at its source no doubt violates my sense of history, still like Sartre I also once thought that the eternal problem of humanism was possible to resolve by means of the Marxian dialectics. However the left's dichotomy of the ends and the means used to pain me even then ; and I always suspected that that conflict would never end.

At least I realized before long that once I accepted the axiom of class struggle, sentimentality would be my sole pathway into the world of the working class ; and therefore I always wanted to find out if the fall of the risen is inevitable in communism as the rise of the fallen is certain. That my worries were no oracles of self-interest, has been recently proved by the unlasting authority of Lysenko, Fadayev etc. ; and whensoever my trust might have died out, on roaming the main streets of Budapest its ghost has again conjectured that the premature death of ten or twenty million Russians and the rise in that country's general prosperity are no doubt simultaneous, still since it flouts causality, Khrushchev's state is nourished on the exploitation of the down-trodden exactly like the late British Empire. But, in spite of his intimate knowledge of such incidents and disasters Sartre is still reported to be saying, that since progress is the soul of the true writer he is bound to think successively that the working class is the avant garde, the Communist Party is as it were the representative of the working class, and history has been realized in the communists' holy land the Soviet society and its satellite democracies ; and if such faith should suit the author of *Les Mains sales*, then I am not ashamed that on the first acquaintance I could not see that Marx's theory is not synthetic but analytical, in not only application but planning as well.

The dialectical synthesis is an accord in name alone ; and in fact it is because in that fatal duel the annihilation of both sides is inevitable, that at each of its stages the internecine conflict of the self-im-

posed tyrants is certain. That is, to an optimist prophet like Marx the unending dialectic of good and evil is naturally unacceptable ; and as the race of those prophets of whom he was the last descendant is very dear to God, so are they, on realizing that in the mortal world the compound rise of sin and the punishment resulting thereof are irresistible, until now hostile to the environment. The Marxist cadre on the other hand, by virtue of self-application, are the forerunners of historical evolution ; and since they are determined to cut short the road to progress, they are not interested in anything except destination, even Arjuna's remorse at the end of Kurukshetra is impossible for them for want of time. But for the self-absolutist even injustice accrues to him ; and if he does not wish that his self-reproach should end in suicide, then he is bound to try so that there be at least no excess of evil in his actions: ...

And this perhaps is the reason why even in the face of 'nihil' the self goes on seeking. Interestingly, Sudhindranath used the image of a nest and Orion :

... I have no time left to build a new plinth, the materials too are scanty in today's market ; and for that reason even the repair of the present home is left unfinished. That is, if we let go a blind faith when true faith is unavailable in society, the advent of the void will be irremediable ; and in such situations the nihilist is not blameworthy, rather his daring is worth emulating to the saint as much as to the man of intellect. Therefore the emancipation from superstition is the prime act of truth today ; and in absence of tall hopes I do not see the horrors of disaster, rather feel the need of endeavour. However in negative criticism compassion is inadmissible ; and habit being the enemy of vision I am sceptical no doubt of argument as well ; still I cannot help admitting that though I am busy at censuring I am undeft at correction. Fortunately I know that my nest is tiny and tattered ; and so the endless and eternal sky is my only hope. For there Kalpurush too is dangling ; and it is the said servant of Death that is the Greek Orion, who on

realizing the impossibility of extricating the wild beasts, has become the arbiter of paradoxical philosophy and poetry.

That titanic hunter is again blind by a divine curse and unbodied; and so on seeing him refrained from hunting I have accepted without shame my inability to shoot the target. ... For in the universe-wide law of repulsion let alone I, even my Creator is fast running towards annihilation; and though even after me his shadow will be noticeable to many, the influence of the other stars is meanwhile almost everywhere evident. But the only hope is that compared to the cosmos the human kind is so small that the universe has nothing to lose or gain in the eccentricity of the pygmies; and though in the undying banyan of evolution our nest is very fragile, the endless heavens are uncaged by the bird-raising fruit of that tree. ...

It is this nest that we heard him speak of in *Dashami*, especially in the last poem, the very last he probably wrote. The poem is called "Nashta Nid", the broken nest, "The Vagrant" in Sudhindranath's own translation. This is perhaps his simplest looking poem, though one of his most obscure, because of its approximation to the Mallarméan ideal.

The tree, a shock of red and yellow, shakes its crown ;
The parrot hovers, kept from nest ;
The year is overblown ; the hangdog sun goes down ;
And bones, though old, are yet impressed.
The wind alone is loud with distant lamentations—
An infidel intoning runic evocations,
While Time, at wanton play amidst extinct oblations,
Reiterates his ageless jest ;
And rid of dust from homing kine, the sky
transcends the common noun—
The tree's ambition and the parrot's forfeit nest.

Then all at once, uprushing from the chthonic deep,
The Dark Begetter overwhelms,

The wind grows deathly still, and latitudes of sleep
 Disintegrate the charted realms.
 Oh, no, the night is not inert : its chronic fever
 Breaks out in spangled sweat, as straining at
some lever,
 It alters far to near ; and subtle like the beaver,
 The moment makes of fretted elms
 An ark for perfect self-assurance. But, involved
in whirlwinds' sweep,
 The parrot strays till Void, triumphant, overwhelms.

What is an affirmative here in the last two lines is in the original a question which makes the experience intenser. Literally : "Then why does the lonely parrot keep straying, / Whom does the unfriendly dark seduce ?"

This was written on 31 March 1956. In July 1956 he joined the newly founded Comparative Literature Department at the newly founded Jadavpur University as a part-time visiting professor. His assignment was mainly 18th century European literature and late 19th and early 20th century Western poetry, as well as Madhusudan. He taught twice a week. As I have said above, we owed this to Buddhadeva Bose and they benefitted mutually : for Sudhindranath this was almost a rejuvenation, for teaching not simply meant putting his ideas in order and doing perhaps some re-reading in areas he liked, teaching also meant an immediate response from the students which inspired him very much ; for Buddhadeva Bose this was getting a rarely cultivated man, a major poet of his language, on his faculty, besides furtherance of an already established intimacy. And although by common practice this was a slightly irregular appointment, the university felt quite fortunate. And for the students it was unlike anything they had had before, for in the first place Comparative Literature was unlike anything they had had before, and then to be taught by Sudhindranath Datta along with Buddhadeva

Bose ! They heard him unfold on the one hand the history of the European rational tradition, and on the other explicate modern poetry since Mallarmé. Those who still remember his lectures claim that they were not only well-delivered, but absolutely comprehensive, for he spoke of literature as much in terms of philosophy and history as of aesthetics. This was also evident in a brief seminar talk he once gave on "The Necessity of Poetry" which was printed in the first number of *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature* edited by Buddhadeva Bose.

Sudhindranath taught for a year, 56-57, and then went on his fourth trip abroad. But in 57 he also brought out a second edition of his first book of essays, *Svagata*, and as mentioned above, a second book. They were issued simultaneously. We have seen above the changes from *Svagata* 1st edition to the 2nd ; the Bengali literature essays were taken out and one Western literature essay was added. There was also a postscript added to put it all in perspective, the concluding words of which were :

... Bengal has not only lost the standard of great literature today, but it is doubtful whether she had ever had it ; and in spite of being in this God-for-saken country one who is interested in the tradition of artistic excellence, is bound to cross the seas. So the introduction of alien writers in the present book is not pointless ; and there is relatively more importance given here to the moderns for the reason that our perspective on the ancients is in the most part conventional. That is, because they are not subject to any encomium from generation to generation, it is the moderns regarding whom the basic literary principles are necessarily admissible ; and, true, in that test some of them are not successful, but what matters in their case is that the same rule applies to all. Unfortunately even their example has not taught me how to create beauty or refute the metaphysics of 'you-are-He' ; still because I am ready to write, cultivation must follow nature. But as my inability is existential, so is their ideal impersonal ; and for the poetical pursuit as for social work there

is need of an impartial model. My irrevertible journey in search of that model may not be entirely useless.

Yet it is only the great exit which is without return ; if elsewhere the wish to do good does not inconvenience the returnee, then we are bound to call that eccentricity ; and though I am ashamed that even after such effort I cannot produce lasting poetry, I am repentant that in my daily life the acquired principles of greatness are ineffective. That does not mean that like elderly Hindus I too shall now dedicate my life to after-life ; rather the contrary ; and the more I discover myself the more I realize that the world is not hostile to me, the external universe is beautiful and hospitable. Still I have no doubt that a good man is better than a good poet ; and a good man may not be able to write the best literature, yet without the purity of body, mind and speech it is not possible to create great poetry. That is, as the union of desire and dispassion is the saint's duty, so is the poet's imperative the harmony of play, work and spirit ; and since even the beginnings of that equation are nowhere visible in me, I have no right to a chanting of goodness.

The number of essays in *Svagata* 2nd edition is fifteen not counting the foreword and the postscript, the number in *Kulāy O Kalpurush* (Orion and the Nest) is nineteen. And it too has a foreword from which I have already quoted. Of these nineteen, five are on Tagore : "Beginnings of the Genius of Tagore" (1939), a review of *Rabindra-Rachanabali* (The Collected Works of Tagore) Vol. I and developed from the above-mentioned English review he had done for *The Statesman* ; "The Tagore-Harvest" (1940), a review of *Rabindra-Rachanabali* Vols. 2 and 3 ; "The Emancipation of Metre and Tagore" (1933) ; "The Revolution of the Sun" (1936) ; and "The Sunset" (1941), written within two days of Tagore's death. Of the rest, three are on contemporary Bengali writing : "Utterance and Realization" (1946), mainly on Buddhadeva Bose, "Antah-

shila" (1933), a review of Dhurjatiprasad Mukherjee's novel of that name, and "Chorabali" (1937), on Bishnu Dey's book of poems of that name; one on the Bengali metre (1933), a review of a book called *Bangla Chhander Mul Sutra* (The Basic Principles of the Bengali Metre) by Amulyadhan Mukherjee; and the other ten are on various subjects, not straight literary: "Art and Freedom" (1937), "Humanism" (1932), "The Assault of the Monistic Absolute" (1934), a review of S. Alexander's *Beauty and Other Forms of Value*, "The Ideal of Science" (1937), an appreciation of Pavlov, "From Rise to Fall" (1937), an essay on the future of European civilization where Spengler features quite substantially and in contrast, one modern Indian philosopher, Brajendranath Seal, "The Eighteenth Century Background" (1940), a review of Marjorie Villiers' *The Grand Whiggery*, "Victorian England" (1938), a review of two books on the subject, "Barbarian Civilization" (1939), a review of Patric Carleton's *Buried Empires*, "Fathers and Sons" (1939), a review of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, "Progress and Change" (1938). Like the *Svagata* essays these too were almost all meant for *Parichay*.

Kulay O Kalpurush was Sudhindranath's last book during his lifetime and perhaps fittingly dedicated to one of his first readers, Dhirendranath Mitra—I have quoted the dedication above. In the foreword he tried to sum up his position, not simply as a writer but as an intellectual in general. His views here as a writer are evident from his appreciation of Tagore and of a few of his contemporaries, but his other essays are in no way secondary—it would be wrong to take Sudhindranath's prose as a mere reflection of his aesthetic. Take the earliest essay of this book for instance, "Humanism" ("Manusyadharmā"); this is how it opens:

There are such inconsistencies in the human nature as make it absurd to even attempt any prophecies about him; and perhaps it was by favour

of these discords that when Copernicus on stripping the earth of its pride brought it under the sun's rule, sudden manifestations of humanism were spread all over Europe. Even on hearing that compared to the cosmos the mortal world is only a tiny particle, the inspired Western man did not show any signs of submission, did not revert to the godfearingness of the classical civilizations ; flinging off the medieval concern with after-life he suddenly spoke out in Terence's words, "I am man, even human flaws are not alien to me." One who realizes on what courage and sacrifice does the efficacy of this ideal rest, will not find the subsequent advance of the West any longer mysterious. In the human world man alone is forever, in human society man alone is worth serving, human good alone is the aim of humanism—it is natural that the race whose art and literature, science and philosophy, life and death are inspired by this truth of truths, will inevitably rise. That conquest did not lose its tracks in the mysterious lure of any lost paradise, so the whole world was awakened by its trumpet ; that laurel wreath was not woven in any unreal dreams, so even thrifty nature sent him a shower of gifts ; in his pledges of amity was the eternal conflict of the ultimate truth and the immediate aims of life resolved, so on his tryst with the unknown the intellect was not afraid of any absurdity in reasoning.

Or take one of the late essays, "Fathers and Sons" ("Pita-Putra")—again the opening :

To trust individuality is almost impossible today : with the help of higher mathematics it may rather be proved that the earth itself is the centre of the solar universe ; but no head of state will any longer let man have an access to self-determination. Yet only twenty-five years ago this ideology was the general mark of human civilization. Of course even then the authorities were nowhere niggardly in repression of the poor ; and let alone choosing his own fate, even the cultivation of God-given faculties against the pressure of unrestricted opposition felt hard to the individual. However the oppressors too of those days were afraid of

scandal ; without an excuse of emergency they would not go ahead and curtail the rights of the people ; and in practice no doubt a great many thought the weak to be the slaves of the mighty, still in public forum everyone unhesitatingly admitted that we all were reservoirs of the will force, and so, we all had a right to good morals.

And here is something from 1937, "The Ideal of Science" ("Vijnaner Adarsha") :

The uselessness of the poets has long been found out ; and at least since Hegel philosophy has been known to be an empty vessel. This is the age of science : the modern supernatural is in the hands of engineers ; today's aphorisms are in the mouths of mathematicians ; and to see a sacrifice of self-interest on the altar of truth man now does not rush to a sage's hermitage, crowds up in a physicist's laboratory. Yet the modern world is superstitious as of old ; and as ancient Egypt by considering her priests infallible paved the way to racial ruin, so are we on our way to doom by looking upon the scientists as supermen.

And so on ; we can multiply the examples. The point is, Sudhindranath might have called himself a dilettante but his interests were consistent and, more, interwoven with his literary ideas. That is, we should not speak of one set of essays without thinking of the other.

The five essays here on Tagore pretty much sum up Sudhindranath's views on the Olympian, although on a few other occasions too he made complementary hints. In fact one of his very last essays, written in English and written in the very year of his death, was on Tagore, though those who had commissioned it for the centenary found it a bit too controversial on a certain detail from Tagore's life. Anyway "Tagore as a Lyric Poet" was published posthumously by Abu Sayeed Ayyub in *Quest* and is now in the O.U.P. book.

Though major poets have seldom been as plentiful as autumn leaves in Vallombrosa, they are to this

very day more numerous than we pretend ; and could we but feel less patronizing to our contemporaries, we would no longer equate greatness with antiquity. Yet exceptions continue to prove all rules ; and whether we agree or not with Jamini Roy, the foremost painter of Bengal, that his homeland belies what holds good for the rest of the world, we must admit that the few acres of green grass, which seem to him so abnormal, come under the operation of general principles because they gave birth to Rabindranath Tagore. For Tagore remains the one Bengali writer comparable to the past masters ; and since it was almost through his lone efforts that our literature, nearly a thousand years old when he began, divested itself of endemic modes and rustic preoccupations to become a part of the republic of letters subject to universal canons of taste and technique, Tagore's juniors might reasonably maintain that, whereas even after death he outshines the planetary moderns like his namesake the sun, some of them now reign supreme in their particular orbits by virtue of the laws inherent in his system and its development.

This is how it opens and clearly echoes what he had already said in Bengali. For instance his 1939 review, "Beginnings of the Genius of Tagore" ("Rabindrpratibhar Upakramanika"), had opened alike : "Whether or not great poets are rare, a good many of them are still thriving in today's cultural crisis ; and should we lower our degree of disrespect for the contemporaries, we would not discover greatness in the distant past alone, but would take the moderns too for masters. But even the so-called irrefutable rules are subject to exceptions ; and for that reason in spite of the general principle mentioned above, at least in India, of all living writers only one is comparable to the ancients." Or take this : "The mentality of the Bengali who is still under fifty is mainly influenced by Tagore ; and those too who have grown older are, if they are discerning, bound to admit that modern Bengali culture has been created by Tagore alone." ("The Tagore-Harvest" : "Rabisashya") Or : "Tagore is the

fulfilment-bestowing Ganesha of Bengal today. No doubt he presides over our festivities and rituals, without his blessings even our trade does not thrive." ("The Revolution of the Sun": "Suryavarta").

But this does not mean that writing about Tagore he suspended his critical faculties or his sense of history. In his rather early "The Emancipation of Metre and Rabindranath" ("Chhandomukti O Rabindranath") he raised the issue of Tagore's antipathy for one of his immediate predecessors, Michael Madhusudan Dutt: "In his later life Rabindranath has more than once apologized for his adolescent unfairness to Michael, but has never freely acknowledged his debt to him, as he has with reference to Bihariāl; and the explanation for this laconism is perhaps in the fact that his relation with the latter is comparable only to the relation between the lamp and the moth. That is to say, in the culmination of Tagore's *matrachhanda* the very existence of Bihariāl has evaporated; but such complete disappearance is unthinkable in the case of Michael; and when his *aksharvritta* seems inimitable to Rabindranath, it not only stands apart by itself but is also useful to this day as an example of what is to be avoided."¹ Or from his last:

Tagore's obsessive concern with the contents of his mind did not, of course, produce uniformly good results: justified, no doubt, by second-hand accounts of current happenings in the West, an excess of self-reliance made his early style weak, and his metres now too soft and again too rude; and if, nevertheless, the newcomer continued to receive lavish praise, it was because the discerning, whatever their ultimate allegiance, had tired of the regulation stateliness of every Bengali writer, irrespective of innate merit. But Tagore's admirers wronged Ishwarchandra Gupta by dismissing his

1. Trans. Ketaki Kushari Dyson in the O.U.P. book (I have taken a little liberty and left out one word which I felt was redundant). *Matrachhanda* or *matravritta* is the Bengali quantitative measure where certain *akshars* or syllables are counted long and certain short. In *aksharvritta*, on the other hand, all *akshars* are counted equal.

impeccable verse as the disguise of a mere sensualist without any trace of taste or spark of spirituality; and even they admitted perforce that, apart from exemplifying moral and intellectual integrity of the highest order, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar demonstrated also that our prose, initially a creation of English missionaries for propagation of the Bible, could deal fully with varieties of religious and secular experience.

As said above, in 1957 Sudhindranath left for the United States. This was an assignment at the University of Chicago and he was accompanied by his wife Rajeshwari. The route he took was eastern, thus things in a way coming full circle after about three decades. But what did he do at Chicago where he stayed some seven months or so? There is a brief description in Edward Shils's introduction to the O.U.P. book: Sudhindranath worked on an autobiography, meticulously about six hours a day, five days a week, achieving some 74 pages of the O.U.P. format, "early chapters from an unfinished autobiography". This was his own subtitle to the unfinished *World in Twilight*, 16 chapters, which he seemed to have begun mainly under Shils's urging who was his de facto host and on the sociology faculty there. Sudhindranath was doing the book pretty straight, beginning at the very beginning with his first blotches of memory, then moving on to his parents, his grandparents and his two uncles, father's younger and elder brothers, then two cousins—the two uncles' sons—the family house, bits of childhood interwoven with bits of old Calcutta, and then his mother's family—maternal grandfather, his brothers, touching on his mother's brother and cousin, and breaking off after some historically rather revealing details about his youngest maternal granduncle. Not merely as an unfinished autobiography, but also as a socio-historical document of the early 20th century Calcutta, it is quite valuable. Incidentally when Britain's *Encounter* magazine published a series on the world cities, he was commissioned

to do the piece on Calcutta (1957) which makes substantial complementary reading.

Sudhindranath's English style is not unlike his Bengali, and what a then iconoclast said jocularly about the rationale of "semicolon-and" in *Kulay O Kalpurush* or *Sragata* might also be said equally jocularly about his English. In other words he is equally dialectical or ironical—when he says something its obverse immediately lays a claim, and the process is ponderous but at the same time delightful. No wonder he should take some six or seven months to write only 74 pages or so. Since it is in English and is in print—in fact the O.U.P. book borrowed its title from it—I am not going to quote at length from it; but as a sample of his English style here is a passage which has also a direct bearing on what he meant by "the world of twilight":

Casting about, in my snobbish youth, for an illustrated motto to put at my letterheads, I took from the Rig Veda a fragment of the hymn to light and, placing a burning lamp under the devanagari script, added a gothic D to form a design of the grossest asymmetry; and as the last detail showed, I imitated Goethe, at best half-consciously. Yet the desire to possess a patent of nobility, even if forged, was not the only motive behind my pitiable lack of taste; and while in this simulation I merely followed the example of countless Calcutta families no older than mine, unlike them, I felt overwhelmed by an inner and obsessive darkness that I have been unable either to dispel or to accept. To me at least the outer world of twilight in which my childhood passed seems an emanation of deeper shadows; and I still cannot understand what it all amounted to—the combination of rationalism and obscurantism in my father, of respectability and libertinage in uncle Dhiren, of cruelty and kindness in my mother, the consulting of astrologers before a journey, the economic interpretation of caste, and the denigration of logic by logic. Lesser levels too proliferated antinomies; and thus it never sufficed to call a qualified doctor when illness occurred, but quacks also came in by the back door, so that no road to

recovery should remain unexplored. In fact the latter enjoyed greater prestige; and an Italian herbalist continued to be revered in our household even after he had killed himself with his own treatment.

Spengler might provide a generic answer to my specific problems; and my mind is such an unstable compound of the East and the West that I would be the last person to assert that cultures survive the atrophy of civilization by the interchange of rejuvenating concepts. ...

Sudhindranath left Chicago in June 1958 and was in New York till August when he went to London. There he met so many of his English friends from Calcutta after such a long time including John Auden, 'Sindbad' Sinclair, Oscar Skilbeck, Malcolm Muggeridge and Cyprian Blagden. He and Rajeshwari also did a little travelling and finally returned to Calcutta in September 1959 after two years of absence. In Rome he had looked up his friends Sushil and Indira Dey and complained of an occasional heart beat he missed, but with a good humour that came so naturally to him. When he resumed work at Jadavpur he was bubbling with good humour. Not only did he come twice a week and do an absolutely thorough job, but sometimes he also got Dhurjatiprasad Mukherjee to come chiefly to give the young social scientists a chance to meet him and to give him a chance to meet them and more, to cheer him up a little after he had almost become a derelict with an attack of cancer. On top of teaching Sudhindranath was writing—produced two essays in English, the above-mentioned Tagore essay and an essay on "Hugo and Others" which also was published in *Quest*, a Bengali essay for the weekly *Desh*, "Budor Chokhe Ragi Chhokrar Dal" (The Angry Young Men in the Eyes of an Old Man) on the then new British writing. He also did, in collaboration with Rajeshwari, some translations into English from contemporary French, Italian and German poetry for the hundredth and second international number of Buddhadeva Bose's

quarterly *Kavita* (Poetry). He also began revisions for a new edition of *Orchestra* and a second edition of *Krandasi*, and did a few changes too to the second edition of *Samvarta*. And on 31 December 1959 he made a version into Bengali of the German poet Hans Egon Holthusen's "Acht Variationen ueber Zeit und Tod : IV" ("Mrityur Samay"), and in his notebooks two preliminary translations of the first sixteen lines of T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" were posthumously discovered.

He had already turned fifty-nine. But he looked younger. And those who saw him in the early months of 1960, found him in the highest spirits. He talked, he argued, he exuded his inimitable charm in every gesture or every mannerism, and underneath there was a lot of warmth—for friends, some new some old, for students, for fellow poets, for chance acquaintances, and of course for the family—that tall body on a Jadavpur corridor or at a College Street poetry reading or in a friend's parlour or at his own home at 6 Russell Street on the southern verandah, had indeed come to mean a great lot of warmth besides a great lot of intellect. The ties seemed to be growing stronger. His immediate younger brother whom he might not have had seen for some time, suddenly received a visit. And his youngest brother whom he had given his power of attorney and saw oftener, he would now see frequently. He would even drop in at his office, surely to discuss his will or some such thing but once or twice to say hello too. On one occasion, in fact the day before he died, he dropped in and waited some two and half hours. We do not know what he had come for and waited so patiently for.

The moment seemed auspicious. The same evening he and Rajeshwari went to a dinner at a friend's. They came home late. Very early in the morning he complained of an uneasiness. He lit a cigarette but could not smoke it. Rajeshwari called up the doctor. But when the doctor came he was dead. Of cerebral haemorrhage, on 25 June 1960.

Postscript

A poet is often known by his obsessions. And like Jibanananda Das, like Amiya Chakravarty, like Buddhadeva Bose and Bishnu Dey—the four other major poets of his generation, Sudhindranath Datta too had his obsessions. Jibanananda is perhaps best known by his unforgettable metaphors containing his unforgettable perceptions, Amiya Chakravarty by his relaxed prosody which agrees with his quiet acceptance of life, Buddhadeva Bose by his tensions that reflect the supreme value of suffering, Bishnu Dey by his keen sense of social reality realized in a rather crisp rhetoric; and Sudhindranath by his prosaic dialectic giving shape to a highly poetic charge of emotion. Of all five he is the most sonal which makes him the least satisfyingly translatable. Besides his prosody is the most regular and vocabulary the most traditional, which might make him look less modern than the other four. But Jibanananda saw him “bright with the rays of despair”, and Jibanananda could not be any truer.

It is not uncustomary to see a polarity between Jibanananda and Sudhindranath, in fact one of the early homages by a then young poet was made along that line. And in the poetic method as well as taste, no other is so unlike Jibanananda as Sudhindranath. But once we have recorded that, once we have recorded that Jibanananda is the antipodes of Sudhindranath and Sudhindranath of Jibanananda, they seem to have an affinity in the quality of the experience they have written. But probably we do not appreciate this affinity all so well: why else should poets today at times claim that Jibanananda alone is their master, that they had little to learn from Sudhindranath?

But is that really true, have they really learnt little from him? It is over two decades now after his death and perhaps time we took a look at what kind of impact he has made. Ostensibly not much, ostensibly the aspect of the poem today is un-Sudhindranath-like. But if we look deeper

we shall find quite a bit of him. In the attitude to the words as such, in the general terseness, or in the way argument is interwoven with images. Besides, in critical awareness there has been a serious impact of him even though he may not have very many actual imitators in prose.

However there is one impact about which there seems to be a general agreement: he introduced the classical mode in modern Bengali poetry. But does that mean he was a so-called classicist? In a glowing tribute written a few months after his death Buddhadeva Bose denied it: "... Sudhindranath is a romantic poet at heart and one of the greatest romantics. As evidence I shall simply cite two things: first, the intensity of passion in his love poems, the unabashed and private cry of desire and anguish—the like of which we shall not find in the whole history of Bengali poetry, in neither Vaishnava poems nor Rabindranath, not either in any of his contemporaries. Secondly, his sense of loss at the non-existence of God—that too is a true romantic mark. He did not want to fill that void with poetry, nor with 'people' or history: so, even though he called himself a materialist, his poetry tells us that his thirst was for that eternal essence." This is how a contemporary felt about him, one who edited his *Collected Poems* and thus presented him, as it were, to posterity.

In fact in these twenty years or so, Sudhindranath has become a classic. And to become a classic is often to go out of circulation, but to go out only to settle within. How can we deny him when he is working within us, how can we deny, so to speak, a literary gene? When we are writing today we are also writing him; that is his one share of immortality. The other share is the work itself.

Works of Sudhindranath Datta

P o e m s

Tanvi 1930

Orchestra 1935, second edition 1954

Krandasi 1937

Uttarphalguni 1940

Samvarta 1953, second edition 1955

Pratidhvani 1955

Dashami 1956

E s s a y s

Svagata 1938, second edition 1957

Kulay O Kalpurush 1957

P o s t h u m o u s

Sudhindranath Datta Kavyasamgraha (Collected Poems), edited by
Buddhadeva Bose 1962 ; second edition 1976

The World of Twilight : Essays and Poems (in English and English
translation) 1970

Errata

Page	line	for	read
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87	9	more or equal	more or less equal

